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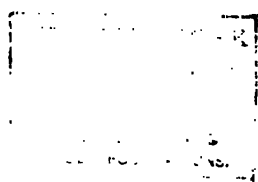


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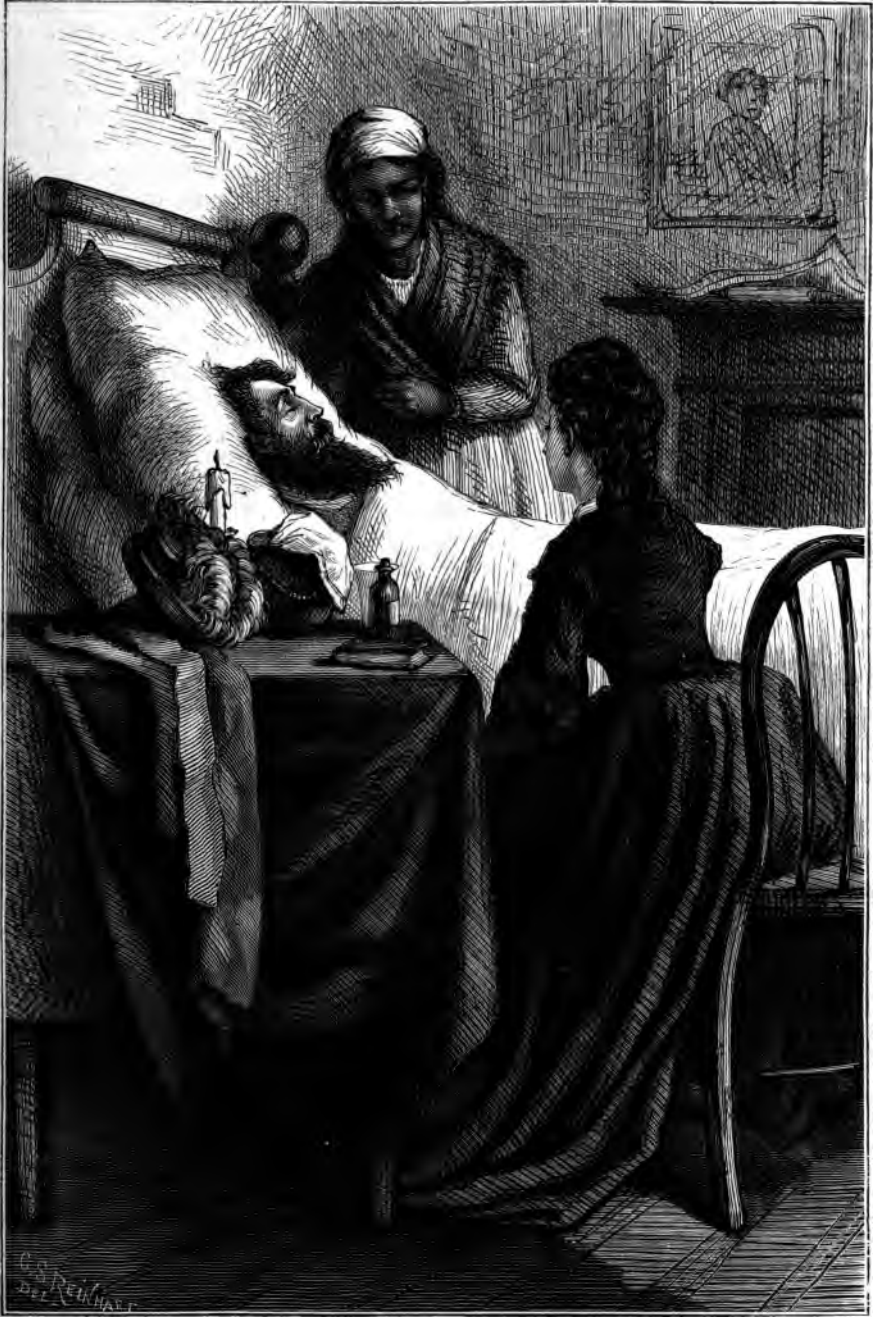


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“‘SINCE WHEN?’ SHE WHISPERED.”—[SEE PAGE 118.]

GOOD LUCK LANE

A STORY OF THE FLOOD

BY WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

IN THREE SECTIONS

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A GOOD INVESTMENT.

A STORY OF THE UPPER OHIO.

By WILLIAM FLAGG,

AUTHOR OF "THREE SEASONS IN EUROPEAN VINEYARDS," &c.

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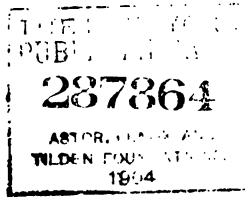


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A GOOD INVESTMENT.

CHAPTER I.

"Remote from cities lived a swain,
Unvexed with all the cares of gain."



side of the creek stands a log-cabin, and near it are a log corn-crib and ox-stable, both under one roof. The buildings were constructed by the present owner in fee when he began to make his "clearing," but have never since then been repaired by any body. Over a large part of the level ground forming the middle of the valley the creek strays at random, its clear waters made brilliant by flowing, rippling, and dashing over an uneven bed of perfectly black slate. Between the stream and the hill on the west are two small fields, poorly fenced, bearing stunted growths of corn. Extending beyond these, and including the base of the hill up to where it becomes precipitous, is an imperfectly cleared space, partly occupied by stumps and bushes, where rattlesnakes inhabit, and partly covered with patches of blue-grass and white clover, where hogs and other cattle sometimes range. The hill beyond is, like all others of the region in question, very high, exceedingly steep, and covered with a heavy growth of timber.

Within the stable, before an empty rack and manger, a pair of lean little steers stand and chew the cud. On a stump just without the door of the cabin the proprietor of the domain, the creator of it all—if destroying the beautiful forest with axe and fire may be called creating—sits and chews tobacco.

FLAMING ROCK is on the easterly side of Smoky Creek, one of the many beautiful streams of the wilder and more picturesque parts of Southern Ohio. The rock rises precipitously to a height of more than two hundred feet from the level of the pool at its base. It is of bituminous slate, so abundant in combustible matter that one day it took fire near the bottom, and continued to burn until a freshet came to put out the flames, six months afterward: whence come the names of "Flaming Rock" and "Smoky Creek."

On a slight rise of ground at the opposite

Old Bill Hagan, lord of the soil though he be, and central figure of the scene, is dressed, to tell the truth, no better than any landless ragamuffin. Certainly no land-holder of any land where men wear clothes at all, except our own, was ever seen with hat, shirt, breech-

es, and suspenders such as make the costume of this one.

Nor does his wife, Betsey, as she stands in the door-way behind him, appear to any better advantage. Her haggard but erect form is covered in part by an old calico gown, faded, but not with washing; torn in many places, but nowhere patched or darned; supplemented where deficient with a red flannel petticoat, and under that with a shift, perhaps; the jupon and skirt, such as they are, being distended at the bottom with a bamboo hoop. No cap adorns or hides her tangled locks of iron-gray, and her feet are as bare as her head. In appearance a very hag, there is no reason for doubting she is really one. Had she been a saint, she could not have lived thirty-five years with Bill Hagan and borne him sons and daughters. She can scratch, bite, gouge, get drunk when she can obtain whisky, steal, whenever in that poor neighborhood she can lay hands on any thing that is a subject of theft, and has a gift for scolding such as few women are blessed with. She has been known to stand in that door-way, close behind where her husband sits, and, with arms akimbo and wagging head, storm at the man until she fell down in a vertigo. It should be added that in this she is encouraged and led on by the rock, which has an admirable echo, and always responds promptly and distinctly to whatever she says, sometimes blaspheming frightfully in doing so.

In their earlier married life Bill used to knock his wife down whenever her scolding became tiresome; but he learned by experience that she and her ally were too much for him, since they could keep up the din even after she was down, and he finally gave over the gentle discipline. Both of them attend all the religious meetings held in that wild and inaccessible district, and both have repeatedly "got religion" after the fashion of the country, and been several times admitted to membership in the Methodist church. Queer Christians they are, to be sure; but they are of a queer community, concerning which an old elder who once rode in that circuit said, "If it is the Lord's will to have a church on Smoky Creek, He must take the people jest as they be."

The old couple were alone together—alone

and lonesome—for, two days before the opening of our story, their son Bob, sixteen years old, and the last of their surviving brood who remained at home, had run away, and, what was worse in the old man's opinion, taken with him his father's rifle, a weapon that was in some sense the same as a crutch to its owner, since, from long habit of taking it with him wherever he went, it had become almost impossible to go a hundred steps from the door without it. In fact, when he had tried on that very morning to stroll up the valley out of ear-shot of Betsey's voice and the black rock's echo, he had not been able to get any considerable distance away, so returned and resumed his seat on the stump, where he remained, saying nothing and doing it, while the sun of July mounted to mid-heaven, and the oxen, with the yoke still on their necks, waited idly in the pen.

Bob had been a real comfort to his mother and father. While he remained about home he was always doing something to furnish the one with text or pretext for a scolding; and in occasionally threshing out his wild oats with a hoop-pole, the other enjoyed a satisfaction which only a parent can know.

But Bob was gone, such as he was; gone from his home, such as it was. Though barely sixteen years of age, according to the tenth row of notches cut upon one of the house-logs, the many stories of battle he had heard told by soldiers returned from the war of the rebellion had roused up the wolf that was in his young blood, as it is in the blood of all humanity, so that he longed to be where men were killing each other, and resolved to seek the sport on the first opportunity. Very opportunely for him there came the raid of John Morgan into Ohio, which, as all know, was in the month of July, 1863. News of the movements of the raiding forces through the country lying to the northward had from time to time been brought by travelers passing down the valley, and the last report, which had come late in the afternoon of the day before the boy disappeared, was that the main body was expected to reach Piketon, a village twenty miles distant, some time during the next day.

And thus, instead of Bob's going to war, war was actually coming to Bob, and he accepted the issue. Waiting only for night to

come and cover his movements, he quitted his sheetless little bed in the loft as soon as the snores of the old people acquired the proper intonation, descended to their apartment by means of three pegs driven into the logs of the house to serve the purpose of the more costly luxury of a ladder, noiselessly removed from its hooks over the fire-place a very old rifle, with its scant supply of ammunition, stole out into the night, and took his way up the creek. Considering as he went what plan of campaign should be adopted, he decided to make for a point where he would be likely to strike Morgan's line of march several miles before it reached Picketon and the level country of the Scioto Valley, his design being to hang upon the skirts of his enemy and harass his flanks. This was very good generalship, it must be admitted, and subject to only the one criticism, that it amounted to "bush-whacking," as warfare in the retail way is termed, the retailers being considered as without the merciful pale of the laws of war, and liable to be shot or hung whenever captured. After ascending the valley of the creek for a distance of five or six miles, and, in going that distance, crossing the devious stream fifty times, he struck off abruptly to the right, and mounting by a rough sled track that came down over the edge of the nose, as it were, of a spur from the hill which bordered that side of the valley, reached one of the peculiar roads which are found running along all the summits or ridges of the steep and narrow hills of that country. These "ridge roads," so important to the inhabitants, form a system of ready-made highways, furnished by nature, with the hills they render accessible, free of cost to county or township treasury. Just as they are today they seem always to have been. Trodden formerly by the Indians, as now by the whites, they are kept open as much by the hoofs of beasts as the feet of men. The traveler on one of them finds himself sheltered for the larger part of the way with interlacing branches of trees which border it, though occasionally he will traverse open reaches where the sun-blest ground is covered with a coarse grass, or if too poor to bear that, decked with wild flags, pansies, and roses. Sometimes he will meet with one of

those almost mysterious shallow basins of water called "bear-wallows," that seem to exist without any drainage adequate to fill them. Even when the later heats of summer dry up wells, and drive the creek in the neighboring valley to hiding-places beneath its gravelly bed, the bear-wallow, though it grows narrower and shallower daily, seldom or never is found entirely empty.

Bob turned into the ridge road and kept in it until he had gone some twenty-five or thirty miles, crossing the head waters of a good many creeks and "runs," but without descending into any of their valleys or ravines. Though the ridge, and the road with it, crooked and turned in an amazing manner, and though branches from it led off toward every spur to the right or left, his knowledge of the habits of the hills and ways of the forest saved him from going astray, even after he had passed beyond the limits of any of his previous wanderings. And when, at length, about the middle of the forenoon, he halted on a bald summit, or "knob," that overlooked a wide and fertile well-peopled valley, such as he had never before seen, he knew perfectly well where he was, and that his objective point was reached.

There was a tall white oak near the knob, from whose top a better survey could be made than from where he stood; so, leaving his gun at the foot of the tree, he climbed till he reached the highest limb that would bear his weight, and, seating himself astride it, with his arms embracing the body, looked off.

The bird's-eye view thus obtained covered five or six miles of the creek bottom; and what he saw there soon satisfied Bob that his information had been correct, as well as his inferences thence derived—namely, that Morgan's forces must come that way, and could not be long in coming, either. The commotion of the inhabitants showed their panic to be great. Cattle and teams were being driven off in all directions but one. From the nearer parts of the valley shouts and cries came faintly up to the ear, and away in the distance, beyond reach of hearing, there could through that clear atmosphere be discerned Lilliputian people running about hither and thither, every litt

head of a family and all the little members of it behaving very much as they would if their house were on fire. After one or two hours the scene became quiet. The cattle had been driven away, all wheel vehicles had disappeared, and so had most of the inhabitants, though some of them still remained by their property and homes, animated by a noble resolve to face the danger they knew to be coming.

By this time the boy began to feel hunger. He slid down from his perch, resumed his gun, and descended into a "cove" at the head of a ravine whose course was toward the valley, and clambered along over great masses of rock fallen from the ledges above, and which roughly paved the bed of a torrent accustomed to roar there in times of rain, till he reached a little pool, or pocket, of water. There, seated on a square block of stone, whose covering of velvet and plush, if it had been real instead of imitation, as it was, and as were all the beautiful hangings of that chamber in the hills, might have cost a cavalryman's equipment, he took from his only pocket a couple of "dodgers"—favorite and appropriate food of bush-whackers—and ate them for his breakfast, drinking during the meal one or more gallons of the water, which last he accomplished by making a notch in the edge of the platform of soft sandstone over which the slender surplus of the pool trickled away, deep enough to draw into a single stream all the overflow, and then putting his under lip to the notch and letting the water enter his mouth as it would.

It ought to be mentioned that the element lost none of its thirst-quenching property for Bob merely because during the repeat another bush-whacker of somewhat different species appeared and marched boldly up to the edge of the pool, where he drank his fill. This one was arrayed in butternut and black; his motto was "Don't tread on me;" and the other, after killing him, counted eleven rattles in his tail.

The search after water had carried the lad well down toward the foot of the hill, and on his going a little further the view opened on a cleared field, occupying a swell of ground at the base—a portion of one of the valley farms, inclosed on the nearer side by

a stone and rail fence, and on the further bounded by the highway. The distance across this field was no more than a convenient rifle-shot, and the low wall of stone afforded as good a breastwork as any free-shooter could wish. Before posting himself Bob moved along the fence to a point where it was crossed at right angles by a path that led directly up a point of the hill, and thence back to the place of his first look-out. It was the highest part of the field, and commanded a clear view for two or three miles up the road. Besides this, the path would afford a most excellent way of retreat. So there, after first inspecting the condition of his piece and his resources of powder and lead, caps, patches, and grease, he took up his position; that is to say, seated himself behind the fence. He was well placed; neither Grant nor Garibaldi could have posted him better.

He looked up the valley, but no Morgan's man was to be discerned. He listened with open mouth as well as ears, but no hostile sound was heard. He fell to reflecting on the situation, and so reflecting, fell asleep. While he slept the whole scene was transformed, and when, an hour later, he woke up, astounding impressions burdened his every sense. Field, forest, and hill were fraught with life and movement. A stifled, low-toned thunder spoke from the ground; dust filled the air; a rifle-shot was heard, and then several more, and distant shouts. Then, beneath a rolling dust cloud about a mile away, the head of a column of horsemen came, advancing at a trot. A distinct sound of hoofs from the opposite hill drew his attention, and roused him to astonishment and something of alarm, as he saw there a squadron of horsemen moving rapidly along its ridge road, parallel with the movement of the main body, but so far in advance of it as to have already passed the point opposite him. An instant later he became aware that a similar squadron, moving like the other, parallel to the central force, was even then trampling along the ridge back of him, and had actually crossed the junction of his path of escape with the road by which he had come, cutting off his well-planned retreat, and bringing to naught his whole art of war. Bob, my boy, the Philistines are

upon you! You are outflanked, outgeneraled, outdone! Arouse! rally your forces! hold a council of war to decide quickly as a council can what next to do!

Bob couldn't.

His head grew hot, his eyes dim; his tongue and mouth became dry; his heart thumped his ribs; something choked him and stopped his breath; he reeled and fell back upon the ground, where the dead leaves rattled under his quaking limbs. The symptoms will easily be recognized as those of the "*buck fever*," with its attendant ague, such as every hunter is, once in his life, attacked with, when for the first time a deer presents itself in all its forest-born innocence, dignity, and pride to the aim of his weapon. Bob was a hunter, and once before had felt the fever; but never before had he beheld bucks such as those which now by hundreds careered down upon him, every steed in the herd a blooded animal, and nearly every rider too: dare-devil, born jockey, and natural dead-shot.

Bob couldn't.

But buck fever is an acute disease, not a chronic one, and, where the constitution is courageous, soon passes off.

As none of the horsemen on the hill at his back had passed within sight of our hero—if so the scared boy might be called—there was sufficient time before those in the valley came up for him to recover, first his senses, then his strength, and lastly, his courage and resolution; and some minutes before the foremost of the column had got abreast of the ambush he had thrust his gun half-way through an opening in the wall, cocked it, and made quite ready. No sooner, however, did he "sight," or try to sight, the horseman in question, a fine specimen of manhood by-the-way, and a perfect stranger to Bob, than the thumping against the ribs again began, and he was obliged to desist. Recovering his nerves again, a few minutes later he tried once more on another stranger, but failed; and so on for several attempts; and although he was gradually acquiring steadiness, yet by the time he got really in condition to shoot with good aim half the column had gone by. And then another difficulty arose. He had been looking into the faces of his foes as they trotted along, and had

seen they were human faces like his own. He had been getting acquainted with them, as it were. Many of them seemed boys no older than himself; they were of his *kind*, and his heart grew averse to shooting them. In fine, he abandoned all intention of killing any body that day, and resolved to peaceably retreat as soon as it should be safe to do so. Figuratively speaking, the angel of mercy had descended, and was weeping warm tears into the powder in the pan of Bob's blunderbuss, just as is represented in the celebrated old picture of "Abraham offering up Isaac." But right here the devil must put in a word, in form of a rifle-shot that resounded from the opposite hill, about a quarter of a mile up the road, and which seemed to cause disturbance among a group of stragglers who were pressing forward their tired horses. Three or four of these at once dismounted and dashed into the woods, while a few of the others discharged their pieces in the same direction, and the rest seemed to occupy themselves with some object on the ground. Bob's attention was concentrated on the pursuit which was plainly being made after a brother bushwhacker not too soft-hearted to pull trigger. The chase lasted some considerable time, and when two of the pursuers emerged from the forest, dragging between them a poor hatless wretch, none of the raiders remained in sight except a small body, a kind of rear-guard, that had just been halted in front of Bob's position, and a few of the stragglers, who still remained opposite the place where the shot was fired. The captors brought their prisoner across the creek, and up to the officer commanding the rear-guard.

"Who have you there?" the officer demanded.

"A bush-whacker, colonel," was answered.

"Why do you bring him here, then? You know well enough what to do. Take him over there" (pointing to the woods immediately behind where Bob lay), "and leave him."

The men, obedient to the command, whose meaning all understood, began to let down the bars of the field, when a young officer came galloping down the road, and suddenly pulled in his horse beside where the prisoner, whose legs were doubling under him, was

being held up. Instantly dismounting, the new-comer drew a revolver and discharged it thrice at the doomed man, who dropped dead. A fourth shot was then heard, and the young officer himself fell. A whole volley scattering followed. The fourth shot was Bob's, and the scattering volley was all aimed at him as he sprang up the steep hill, swift as a deer. He was hotly followed, and by as agile woodmen as himself, and would hardly have escaped had he not beforehand well considered his line of retreat. Without attempting to do his running in the thickets which covered the hill-sides, or among the rocks in the beds of the ravines, he kept boldly on the beaten way which led him up to the ridge road, followed that road a short distance only, then dashed through a thicket at the head of a cove, and gained a side path on the top of a spur which he knew diverged from the main ridge a little further on; followed that till, nearing the point of the spur, its direction became obscure; then, quickly dodging round a hollow tree whose lower opening was on the side opposite the quarter whence pursuit came, and was concealed by undergrowth, he sprang into it and began to clamber upward. He might have continued till he emerged at the upper opening in the tree-top, through which, forty feet above, he could see daylight pouring in, but feared he would make too much noise in doing so, as each movement detached masses of rotten wood that fell rattling to the bottom, so contented himself with attaining a convenient resting-place ten feet from the ground. There he remained while the pursuit came up, swept by, fatigued itself, and was given over, and remained for a good while longer, in the apprehension that his enemies might still be lurking near, having only pretended to give up the search: in this overestimating his own importance, as we all are apt to do. At length he thought it safe, not to descend and continue his flight, but to mount to the top, and there see what could be seen. Elevating then from the hole only his head and arms, he hung by the elbows, with the rest of him concealed in the hollow trunk, and looked about on every side, until, perfectly re-assured at last, he scrambled out, and descending by the more pleasant outside of the tree, started on

the road homeward. As he feared to return to the main ridge road, our hero, as he may now be truly called, since he has drawn blood, descended the point of the spur by a path that led into a small creek or run, and followed its course until it entered the valley of a considerable stream, whose general direction was parallel with that in which Morgan's forces were moving. Here he paused, and was looking to discover a point by which he could mount to the ridge of the hill on the further side of the stream, when the sound of horsemen approaching from up the road sent him to cover in a thicket of sumac. Lying close, and carefully avoiding to stir the bushes or breathe too loud, he was able, undetected, to observe a party of five go by, all of them evidently Morgan's men, of whom the hindmost was leading a sixth animal with empty saddle, to which was fastened a pair of old-fashioned saddle-bags. But they had hardly passed him before they halted to allow their horses to drink in a deep, clear pool at the roots of a sycamore stump.

While there, the one who rode at the head of the party examined his watch, then a pocket-compass, and afterward looked around him. Something there was in his features that reminded the boy of a face he had seen before, and that impressed him painfully. After making his survey the officer, for such he was, said to the man nearest him, who seemed of much rougher aspect than the rest, "Brown, have we not gone far enough on this course?"

"I think we have, lieutenant," replied Brown. "I reckon, if we take up this p'int right yer, and bear to the east, we'll come shortly on to the main ridge about seven miles below whar we left it. By pushing on smart we kin be thar before they all get by."

"How do you happen to know so much about this infernal abolition country?" asked another of the men, as the officer moved further on.

"When I lived in Cavern County, Kaintuck, I was in the horse business, and that sometimes brought me over yer."

"The horse business!—oh, I understand. Cavern County horse-dealers sell a good many more than they buy. They have a way, too, of swapping horses."

Not this remark, but the laugh of the others, caused Brown to redden, and say, "I want to know what you and John Morgan and the whole lot are doing but swapping horses?"

"Oh, this is war."

"Is it?" rejoined Brown: "then I'd like to see jest a little fighting to prove it. Since we crossed the river about all we've done has been-a runnin' off horses and dry-goods. Pretty fast runnin' it's been, too."

Further criticism on the conduct of the war was interrupted by one of the men exclaiming, as he looked back, "Why, where's old Hector? Lieutenant, Hector's missing." The lieutenant made no reply, seeming to occupy himself solely with examining the path up the point which Brown had indicated, and which seemed almost too rugged for horses to ascend; but another of the party said, in rather a low tone, "Don't you know he left him to take care of the body?"

"This way, men!" cried the officer, as his horse sprang up the hill. The others followed, one by one, imitating their leader in not dismounting; and the spirited animals, jaded as they were, achieved the difficult ascent without one false step. But the led-horse, whose bridle was held by the last of the party, on reaching a place where the path was too contracted to admit of two going abreast, reared, broke loose, and, wheeling round, dashed down the hill again.

"Go back, and lead her up," said one.

"Let her alone," said another; "she'll follow of herself fast enough in half a minute, and a good deal better than you can lead her."

The last speaker was right, so far as this, that the mare halted at the foot of the hill, and was, in fact, turning again to recommence the ascent, when Bob, darting from his thicket, seized the trailing bridle, leaped into the vacant saddle, and when the raiders stopped on the summit to give their horses breath, the young bush-whacker was galloping her at full speed up the creek, more than a mile away. Fifteen minutes later he had reached a place of safety, where dismounting, he flung himself on the ground to rest until it should be dark enough for him to venture back to the spot near his first ambush, where he had dropped the rifle, and to the hollow tree, where he had concealed the pouch and horn, without which he by no means dared return to his father's house. Meanwhile, holding tightly by the bridle the mare he had adopted, though allowing her to crop what grass was growing near, he began to meditate on his two exploits—the first, emptying a saddle; the second, filling one. It is not to be wondered at that he could better bear to think on the last than the first. As the animal moved around him he could see blood spots on the leather. He recalled what the horseman had said of a negro being left behind in care of a corpse. The shadows were darkening in the forest. For the first time since the bush-whacker was born he felt averse to being alone, and for the first time, too, his imagination began to act, making the shadows of the trees take unpleasant shapes as they grew darker and darker.





CHAPTER II.

"Come see rural felicity,
Which love and innocence ever enjoy."

THE condition of things as they existed at the farm-house of Flaming Rock on the day following Bob's achievements has already been described on the first page of the preceding chapter, where it was mentioned that Bill Hagan sat upon a stump by the door and chewed tobacco. It was noon; the weather was hot, and stillness possessed the valley and all its inhabitants, from Hagan on his stump to the cricket in the woods. It was a good moment for listening, and, in fact, the dog of the family was listening, as he lay in the sunshine with half-closed eyes. Maybe Mrs. Hagan listened too, for she had held her peace during a long hour.

Suddenly the brute began to rap on the ground with his tail; then, starting to his feet, stood looking up the creek as if awaiting further information.

"That's Bob he hears," said the woman.

"Nary Bob," said the man, after one or two minutes of close attention: "a boy's feet don't make them sounds; them's the hoofs of a horse."

The dog still remained in the same position, whining, but low and doubtfully, and wagging his tail, but slowly and with indecision; while the mother almost whimpered, "Oh dear! I do wish the or'nary fellow would come home."

"I wish he'd get shot," growled the father; "that's what he deserves for stealing my gun. Sure as you live, if the villain ever does come back, I'll teach him how to run off in the night, to go a-cavorting round coercing sovereign States of this Union, with a hoop-pole."

"Your gun!" broke out his wife. "I hope he'll fling the dog-oned old thing into the creek. It ain't shot so much as a ground-

squirrel for the family to eat this ten year. If it was worth shucks you'd ha' gone and traded it for whisky long ago. It would ha' gone where them hogs went that I was fattening for my winter's meat last year, and where them ten gallons of berries went that I and Bob worked two days in the sun to pick, so't I could get a little tobacco and a few notions (and almost got snake-bit at that), and you run off with after dark; and you know very well where they went: they went down that durned red gullet of yourn. Yes, there's where the hogs went, and there's where the huckleberries went, and there's where I wish the durned old rife was rammed down this minute. Oh, you couldn't go and run off a horse, I suppose? No, no! that would be too scary a business for such a coward as you; besides, it's too much like work. A woman can love and respect a man if he does steal a horse now and then for the support of his family, but who cares for a durned sneaking huckleberry thief? But what good would it do if you stole a dozen horses? you'd drink 'em all up; you'd swallow a mare with foal."

She might have gone on at indefinite length—for she was perfect mistress of the subject—had not the loud barking of the dog as he bounded away brought her to a full stop, and left to the rock, that had faithfully echoed all she said, the privilege of being at last distinctly heard as it uttered the words, "*A mare with foal*," while the animal thus announced appeared, coming at full gallop round a turn in the road, and swiftly approached the astonished couple—astonished to see her bear triumphant on her back her own conqueror and their own boy, Bob, who sat widely astride, with extended heels and

elbows, every rag of him and every hair fluttering and streaming in testimony of his identity.

With difficulty the young rider pulled up when he came opposite the ox-pen. Dismounting there he expelled the cattle and installed his steed in their place, supplied the feeding-trough with ears of corn and the rack with corn fodder, took off bridle, saddle, and saddle-bags, and then, with the bags over his shoulder, and carrying the gun in his hand, walked into the house.

"Give me something to eat, old woman, and be quick; for I'm just the hungriest and tireddest fellow you ever did see," was his only greeting, as he hung up the rifle, with its horn and pouch, and flung the saddle-bags on the floor, and himself beside them. The mother made no other reply than to go about the preparation of a cake of corn bread, while the father went and examined the condition of the gun; and on finding it correct, resumed his seat, growling, "It's well for you you fetched it back, you whelp!" In that simple dwelling, though time was as cheap as among the Bedouins of the desert, none of it was ever wasted on ceremony.

Long before the cake could be mixed and put in the spider to bake, the tired and hungry fellow was asleep, reposing on his bags, which was a pity, for each of his parents would have liked to look into them. As it was, Hagan walked out to inspect the horse. She was a beautiful bay, evidently of high blood; but little signified to him her delicate shape, her slender limbs, her silken coat covering ivory bones, her moving nostrils, and flashing eyes—proofs of a descent from a hundred generations who had eaten barley from kind and affectionate hands in the far land of Arabia, which we call barbarian; he was examining her qualifications for the plow, and these he judged to be sufficient, considering the light and friable soil of the creek farm. A thought had struck him, and at the conclusion of his examination he muttered, "She'll do; I'll sell 'em to-morrow."

Sell what? The oxen, to be sure, now rendered supernumerary by the acquisition of the horse. As to the use to be made of the money they would fetch, Mrs. Hagan has already sufficiently informed us in her state-

ment of the case. But let us now hear the other side of that case. The truth is, the farmer of the creek had of late found himself, for the first time in his life, in straitened circumstances. Until the war came, with its heavy tax on whisky and tobacco, he had always lived in ease and comfort for all he knew to the contrary. Such portions of his leisure as he could spare to the labors of his farm or to lumbering in the hills had sufficed to procure him all the necessities of life. If he had needs that went unsatisfied, he did not know of them. Necessity, they say, is the spur to action; out of activity comes progress, and with progress civilization, and all that kind of thing, about which Hagan knew or cared not one straw. Now he had never known other wants than what a very moderate amount of labor would supply; and Hagan was not the man to go and look up unreal and imaginary wants to spur and torment himself with. Could he have been persuaded of the real necessity of shoes and hats for children, ribbons and laces for women, cabinet-maker's furniture for houses, and broadcloth for his own clothing, he might have been stimulated to toil and moil from Monday morning till Saturday evening. As it was, however, he remained too much the ideal of the ancient philosopher, and practiced too faithfully the much-commended virtues of simplicity and contentment, to long after the frivolous things that bestir the progressive world. In only one respect did he resemble the progressive man, and that was in the limitation he had imposed on his own hours of labor. In every week he worked two days to procure food and raiment, drink and tobacco, and devoted the other five to consuming these and to meditation; and by force of habit those days of leisure had become as really needful to his existence as house or clothes, food, drink, or quid. But suddenly in the wane of that existence comes Congress, with its rude taxation, and makes whisky to rise in price from fifteen cents up to fifty cents per quart, and tobacco to advance in the same proportion, putting those two articles of prime necessity quite beyond the capacity of his ordinary income, and compelling resort to extraordinary ways and means; such as converting into spirits the stock hogs of the family, and

sequestering for the same purpose his wife's huckleberries.

Such is the case of Mr. William Hagan, given without reservation or gloss; and, notwithstanding the one-sided statement of Mrs. H., the reader must confess it is a hard and a strong one, and will be slow to blame him for the disposition he contemplates making of the superfluous cattle.

On returning to the house Hagan found Bob occupied with his repast, and Polly engaged in rifling the saddle-bags, whose contents she had emptied on the floor. There was little of value: only a few shirts, drawers, and socks, a tooth-brush, a comb and brush for the hair, some pocket-handkerchiefs, and two towels.

"Oh, let the boy's plunder alone," said Hagan, in a tone of unusual good-humor, the result of his resolution to appropriate to his own use the principal fruit of Bob's expedition. "Let him have the things if he found 'em. Them ain't woman's plunder, nohow."

"Hold yer jaw!" replied the other. "What does he want of all these here store clothes? I'm going to have some on 'em, sure's you live," filling her lap at the same time with the chief portion of the "plunder." As she did this something fell out of the fold of one of the towels, and rolled on the floor till it came within reach of her husband, who seized it quickly and eagerly, but without saying a word.

"What's that?" cried Bob, dropping his corn bread and springing up. Then, flinging himself upon his father like a young wolf, he cried, "Now you jest give that to me. That's my pocket-book; I shot the feller that had it, and it's mine," at the same time seizing upon and struggling to wrest from his father's grip the article whose morocco case and gilt clasp had deceived them both. His efforts, though unavailing to win the prize from the resolute hold that retained it, tore apart the clasp, and disclosed to the view and disappointment of all only the photograph of a little girl.

"There, take your picter," said the elder, after holding it out at arms-length and examining the brass-work to see if it might *not be gold*, while holding the boy by the *hair at arms-length in the opposite direc-*

tion: "I knew what it was all along. I only wanted to devil you jest a little. It's a picter; some folks call 'em likenesses."

Whatever knowledge the man possessed of pictures and likenesses, the woman and boy did not share in it; and they both continued for some time to look at the one in question. She regarded it and its casing with mere curiosity, which having at length satisfied, she turned away and went to hide her "plunder" as well as she could in the old tumble-down corner cupboard. But Bob saw more than his mother did, and, with the photograph lying on the table before him, he held his head firmly by the hair with each hand, and, resting on his elbows, continued to look. There was something in the features and especially in the eyes of the beautiful child of ten whom the picture represented that fascinated him, but not with any pleasant effect. There was beauty there, to be sure, but no sense of Bob's appropriated that. The sense of the beautiful had never been awakened within him, so far as he was informed or believed, but lay as dormant as a possible taste for the Greek classics; and this, although he had been born and reared among delightful landscapes, daily repainted and re-illuminated by sunrises and sunsets as glorious as any skies of the round globe can show. Or if perchance a spell was working on the undeveloped faculty by the charming image that lay beneath his gaze, it was with a most vague effect.

Then what was it so fixed the attention of the untaught boy? The eyes. Mild as their expression was, it recalled, dimly at first, plainer afterward, an expression he had seen before that was not mild but terrible. Mild and sweet as they were, they made him see again the angry and almost demoniacal look of the man whom he had but lately seen put a fellow-being to sudden death, and whom his own hand, an instant later, had sent into eternity. And the more he looked, the more the eyes of the girl seemed to change into those of the red-handed guerrilla, until all the sweet radiance that first beamed from them vanished, and there shone out instead, as from burning coals, the untamed glare of hatred and revenge. The boy's sensations became in-



"AND WITH THE PHOTOGRAPH LYING ON THE TABLE BEFORE HIM, HE HELD HIS HEAD FIRMLY BY THE HAIR."

supportable. With an effort as if for life he closed and clasped the case, and holding it firmly in both of his convulsed hands, ran out into the air and made his way into the woods beyond the creek.

What did he mean to do with the thing? There was fire enough remaining on the hearth to consume it to ashes. The pool at foot of Flaming Rock held water enough to receive and hide it. Or he might bury it in the ground as they do dead people. But he had no thought of destroying it. He clung to it—why he knew not—by force perhaps of that strange instinct that has caused other man-slayers, whom we call murderers, to carefully preserve for years the proofs of their crimes and the very means of their ultimate detection and condemnation.

After moving aimlessly about for an indefinite time he stopped at the foot of a

cliff formed by alternate layers of sandstone and clay shale, piled one upon another to the height of hundreds of feet, and there rested for a while. Presently he seemed suddenly to receive an idea, and began to climb the difficult face of the cliff, until, when nearly at the top, he reached and crawled into a hole, or low-roofed cave, formed between two ledges of stone, partly by natural disintegration of the shale, and partly by the fingers of the Hagan children, who had made it their play-house. Into one of the many niches in the sides Bob thrust his direful treasure, closed the mouth of the niche with clay so as to effectually hide it from any of the few persons who knew of the place and of the perilous way up to it, and who might chance to visit there; having done which he returned home.



CHAPTER III.

"And when his hour of joy is done,
No trouble need he steal or borrow;
A night of sleep is swiftly gone,
And he'll get drunk again to-morrow."

THE mare, on being tried, worked very well in the plow, and accordingly the oxen were driven away and sold. The money thus obtained, after paying for a sow with a litter of half-grown pigs to replace those so improvidently disposed of, proved sufficient to purchase a barrel and a half of whisky, besides a store of tobacco. The whisky was not brought home, but was hid away among the hills, in a place so secret that no discovery need be feared unless some one should have the boldness and cunning to follow Hagan when he secretly visited it with empty bottle in one hand and loaded rifle in the other. The supply lasted him considerably more than a year, for he was a prudent drinker, and husbanded his resources; that is to say, save a few bottlefuls bestowed on her in the first flush of his generosity, he gave none of it to his wife. Truth to tell, she did not deserve even thus much, for with each bottleful she got drunk, and berated him shamefully for his evil habits, and taught Flaming Rock to swear several new and strange oaths.

Two months after her capture the mare gave birth to a foal, which Hagan presented to Bob in a manner that implied its mother belonged exclusively to the generous giver. But as the son rode upon her whenever he wished, it mattered little who paid taxes for her. Every day it lived the colt grew more and more interesting, and Bob grew more and more fond of it; and so the season wore on without its occurring to him that his father's supply of whisky could ever be exhausted. But when midsummer of the following year went by, and the dog-days came, and beneath the power of the ardent

sun the creek began to run dry in places, the whisky barrel went dry also; and so did Hagan—for several days, which made him nervous, and disposed to sit silent on his stump and indulge in sombre meditation. And well might the unfortunate farmer feel gloomy and disgusted for present and future. The war tax had been increased more than sevenfold within the year, and in a few months it was to be increased tenfold! At length he remembered he possessed a horse; the next day that horse and its possessor disappeared. Two days afterward he reappeared a good deal the better for liquor, and met and bore the combined reproaches of wife and son with the calmness of a real stoic.

At first Bob thought seriously of beating his father, but gave up the idea from fear he might get the worst of the battle. Then he grew sulky, and refused to work or speak; but the elder thrashed him with a hoop-pole, and forced him to come to order. Summer went, and autumn came; and winter would surely follow autumn. Meanwhile the colt, being well cared for, was growing apace, and the whisky was being daily consumed. How much of it the price of the horse had procured the boy was unable to learn; nor could he reckon how long it would last. In fact, though the horse sold for more than the oxen brought, the result, in liquid measure, was considerably less. A truly patriotic man—which Hagan was not—would have been consoled by the thought that while consuming the highly taxed article he was replenishing the national treasury, and saving the national life as effectively as if he risked his own (in another way)

on the fields of war—unless he happened to know that in those days precious little of the tax found its way into that treasury, and that the millions of earnest drinkers who fondly imagined they were drinking up the war debt were really doing little better than Scandinavian Thor did when he tried to drain the cup which an ocean was constantly replenishing. And if, instead of sacrificing only the two oxen and one horse on the altar of his country, Hagan had offered up a hecatomb, twelve of the cattle would have gone into the war chest, twelve more to compensate the distillers, and the remaining seventy-six to fatten and encourage speculation and fraud. The horse had procured only a barrel of liquor. Unhappy America! once it would have purchased eight!

The whisky was going; and after the whisky, what? The mare was gone; and after the mare, what? What but the foal, to be sure! following the prophecy of Mrs. Hagan in her random railing. It was Bob's turn now to sit upon a stump, and reflect on all this. The resolution he adopted, after weeks of deliberation, was to get beforehand with his despoiler, and himself run off with his property. But here came the question where to run to, and how to feed and clothe himself and feed and rear the young animal. And this resolved itself into the problem he had never yet faced or considered, namely, what should he do for a living? Work!

Like all other creek boys, he could plow and hoe, gather and husk corn, fell trees, chop logs, cut hoop-poles, peel bark, and, though not yet able to use the whip-saw, broad-axe, and frow as his elders could, knew how to maul rails and split cord-wood as well as any body. But these he had only been used to do in a desultory way—it will not do to say an idle way. By birth and from habit he was averse to all steady, persistent, long-continued exertion of body or mind, such as alone can subdue the original wildness of the human animal, and civilize and develop him. In the United States more than a million like him are to be found. They gather themselves upon hilly, mountainous, and other barren soils, where the cheapness of the land renders its ownership or possession easy to acquire, and where

they can, therefore, be their own masters. More than the gypsies of Europe they spurn control and love freedom; for they have no ancient customs to trammel them, and every family loves to be both independent of and remote from every other. Their religion is usually Methodist, and their politics Democratic. They are—those of them, at least, who are found in the hill country of the Ohio—of full size, strong, and handsome in face and form. They move with erect and graceful carriage, and fight bravely, as every field of the late war can tell.

Now Bob was aware that to escape with his pet beyond the reach of danger he and it must leave the creek country and go where, if he obtained any employment, it must be on condition that he should work from morning to night, and six days in the week, like any common civilized drudge; and he was loath to submit to either the degradation or the inconvenience. He finally compromised with himself by resolving to follow a life of labor only while it should be absolutely necessary, and that, as soon as he should have grown to a man's estate and the colt to a horse's, they would both return and dwell together in the happy valley. Having thus resolved, he only delayed to catch and put a halter on the destined companion of his journey, and make of the trappings its mother had worn a bundle convenient to sling over his shoulders, and then he departed on his way without a word of good-by to father or mother. He had not, however, gone far before he stopped, as if suddenly remembering something he had left behind, flung down the bundle, tied the colt to a tree, and hastily entered the woods. When he came out again he held in his hand the photograph. He could not have gone without that. He placed it in one of the bags, and resumed his burden and his journey.

The first point he aimed to reach was the Ohio River, and though he had never yet seen it, he had learned the nearest way to go was by Churn Creek to the head of Lower Twin, and thence down the latter to the little village of Buena Vista, at its mouth. It was noon when he started off, and though the distance was over twenty miles, he would have traveled it before sunset but for the colt, on whose account he must move slowly.



CHAPTER IV.

ROBERT HAGAN was going forth to get himself civilized, but he did not know it. He was marching on to a better destiny, but could not foresee it. His pathway, as he went, was strewn with the scarlet and gold of ripening leaves, and he breathed that delicious and exhilarating air, mixed of cold and warm, which prevails where persimmons and papaws are sweetening in the clear sunshine that follows a morning of white frost. But Bob, insensible to all these, was heavy of heart. It was not because he was sundering the tender ties which had bound him to the authors of his being that he was down-hearted, for he cared not a persimmon for those ties or those authors; nor was it because he was about to meet in combat the world, the flesh, and the devil, for he was not easily scared. He had been subject to such turns as he now experienced ever since he went bush-whacking, and shot his first man, and, though not practiced at self-examination, had a dull consciousness that they were in some way connected with that event. But his conscience—if that may be said to have been involved—was extremely torpid and undeveloped as yet, like all his other moral faculties. He felt gloom, not remorse; and as he continued on his way, and the exertion of walking brought the sweat to his forehead and sent the warm young blood to flush each extremity and surface, the physical triumphed over the moral, and the gloom dispersed as a cloud.

About four o'clock in the afternoon the colt and its conductor arrived at a farmhouse, in a field beside which a man and two boys were engaged in husking corn and loading it on a wagon. Bob walked directly in through the let-down rails, and began to assist in the work without saying a word, *while the colt followed him and fell to eat-*

ing. The volunteer help labored so faithfully that by the time the sun went down, and a woman appeared at the door of the house to call the hands to supper, the last shock had been husked and the last load was being driven to the crib. Bob followed the others in, but while they took their places at table, he took his by the fire. "Come and have something to eat," said the woman, laying a plate; to which he, as by custom bound, replied, "I ain't no occasion," and slowly took the offered place. The meal was a substantial one of fried bacon, saleratus bread, corn-dodgers, and coffee, and was eaten with no more words than were absolutely necessary. And after it was over, though the family conversed among themselves, Bob sat by himself and took no part. A bed was given him in the loft, and in the morning he was again invited to eat, which he did, with the same protest as before, that he had "no occasion." Then he helped dig potatoes until, as he thought, he had sufficiently compensated his entertainers for his meals and lodging; after which he approached the farmer, and remarking that he must be about going, asked, "How much to pay?" Now when Bob had declared that he had no occasion to eat, he was ravenously hungry; and when he offered to make payment, was without a cent in his pocket—which two falsehoods prove this one truth, that politeness is natural to the man, even in the rudest places.

"Which way may you be traveling?" asked the farmer.

"I'm going down to the river bottom to hunt for a job. Do you think there's any chance?"

"I reckon not this time of the year. The bottom farmers is got a'most all their land into hay since the war begun, and don't hire

much help anyhow. You can easy get a chance on a flat-boat, though, and them pays well."

"Yes; but you see I've got my colt, and they wouldn't take *hit* on a boat, I don't suppose."

"Well, I'll tell you what. If you 'm willing to work among a parcel of Dutch and Irish, I reckon you can git a chance in the quarries round Buena Vista. I've heerd they was right scarce of men since them last big drafts. It's just down at the mouth of Lower Twin."

"Is it fur from here to the head of Lower Twin?"

"Only about three mile. The road goes all the way."

And Bob went on his way, ascending the valley until the hills that bounded it came close together, and their tops lowered till they were less than fifty feet high. Then, passing over a depression, or gap, he entered the chamber of Lower Twin, and followed that in its descent until it widened so as to inclose farms of large extent, and its walls towered to the height of six hundred feet, and came into the little quarry village of Buena Vista, on the Ohio River. The village, though no great things of itself, was to the uninformed backwoods boy something to wonder at with lowered jaw. It contained three stores, two churches, and a large steam-mill for sawing stone. A wider surface than its buildings covered was occupied by huge blocks of stone, each containing about fifty feet, piled high in long ranges bordering on the embranchments of two railways, one of which descended by a steep inclined plane from the quarries up in the hills. While Bob was expending admiration on these, his attention was drawn toward the inclined plane, and, looking, he beheld two rail-cars passing each other midway up, the ascending car empty, and the descending one laden with a block of stone like those in the piles below. When he saw this, and when, after the loaded car reached the foot of the descent, whence the iron rails extended toward the river by what seemed to be a perfectly level grade, he saw a brakeman mount it, detach the rope, and conduct it whirling and rattling away at a speed of twenty miles an hour, he "allowed it was a

miracle," as he afterward confessed. Again, while he yet wondered, there came from up the river the hoarse, deep bellowing of a large steamboat, giving warning that she would land; and following that unearthly sound came the gentler clangor of iron upon brass as she struck her bell. Looking in the direction of these new and stunning attacks upon his sensations, Bob observed the village idlers gathering to the river landing; and thither, as fast as the resisting colt would permit, he followed, reaching the water's edge just as that grand and deadly creation, a Western river steamer, having turned herself in the channel, was approaching the shore, rising and expanding to view as she came till she filled all space in the scope of vision. And again the boy stood and wondered, as Archimedes himself might well have done had he been there; and again he "allowed it was a miracle," as all must allow it was—a wrought miracle. The boat, having made her brief stoppage, was away again and out of sight ere Bob, withdrawing his eyes from the vision, became aware that he was an object of amusement to such of the little crowd as still remained at the landing. To them a "*creeker*"—as they called a backwoodsman—looking at a steamboat for the first time in his life was always a sight worth seeing.

But this one did not remain to be laughed at long; and disdaining to ask questions of his enemies, he found the way as soon as he could back to a railroad, knowing that by following its course he must finally arrive at a quarry. The road led him first to the summit of the inclined plane, and from thence into a basin among the hills, whose bordering slopes were adorned with many a vineyard and orchard, and dotted with houses of the quarry workmen. Trudging on in the middle of the track, where it wound through a steep and narrow cut, suspecting no harm nor meaning any, a locomotive and train, laden with stone, came suddenly upon him, allowing no way of escape except by tumbling headlong into a ditch, and dragging the colt after him. They say horses from rural parts, where no locomotives are seen, are not so liable to take fright, when brought face to face with one for the first time, as their ancestors of two

or three generations ago were, and the reason for this improvement is supposed to be that news of the great invention has spread abroad among all the horse kind, through modes of speech such as Gulliver mentions. Like a country horse, backwoods Bob had heard descriptions of the locomotive, but, notwithstanding all that, he was more astonished than pleased with the adventure. And as he scrambled out of the ditch, and scraped off the thickest of the mud with a chip, he was sensible of a nascent desire to get back again to Flaming Rock. It was a miracle, he allowed; but he was getting tired of such miracles.

He continued on, however, and after going less than a mile further, came to a dead level space, where the track extended itself upon a surface of solid rock, and led up to where stood a large movable crane, which, just then, with a quick steam cough and loud rattling of iron joints, was hoisting toward the skies, at the rate of ten feet in a minute, one of the huge stone blocks before described—making the fourth wonder of the newly discovered world the amazed child of the woods had seen that day.

The sheet or platform of rock he stood upon was an uncovered portion of one of the ledges of that uncommonly level and distinct stratification of sandstone which is found in Scioto and Adams counties. It was over three feet thick, and unvarying in its thickness for miles of extent. Geologically it is of Hugh Miller's favorite old red formation, but its actual tint is ashes-of-roses. The earth had been removed to the width of a hundred feet, and for several hundred feet along the hill-side. Near by the crane, men were at work with stout, short picks, cutting channels in the upper surface of the stone to the depth of six inches; and near to these, others had set a row of iron wedges in a channel already cut, upon which, one after another, in course, a strong man was delivering repeated blows with a hammer heavy as he could swing, whose effect was to rive the rock downward, straight as a plumb-line, through the whole thickness of the ledge. At the further end of the quarry a gang of about fifty laborers were engaged in excavating *still farther the superincumbent earth,*

some of them with picks undermining the steep bank of bright blue marl, as high in some places as thirty feet, and causing it to fall in crumbling masses upon the floor of stone, from whose even surface others were shoveling it into barrows, and wheeling it off to dump into the ravine below. This was the kind of work for which Bob had been told hands were wanted. He could see no possible objection to it; and truly, for one who can wield a pick and handle a shovel as all of Erin's boys know how—that is to say, gracefully, and therefore easily, for the chief use of graceful movement is to soften labor—no prettier work can be found in the world than stripping stone in quarries like those.

The muddy, ragged, distracted-looking boy, as he stood holding by the halter his equally bedaubed infant Rosinante, so attracted the attention of the men from their work that the foreman had to reprove them; but he himself, on turning toward the object which had disturbed them, burst into a laugh, which was joined in by the whole band most uproariously. Never before that day had Bob been laughed at. The people of his own neighborhood saw nothing strange or ridiculous in rags and dirt, and besides, they seldom laugh at any thing. Seventy or eighty men ceasing their work to lean upon their implements and shout and scream at him in a concert, or volley, rather, of merriment, was an occurrence to him almost as miraculous as those others that had been battering upon his nervous system. His courage gave way completely: he broke into almost the only tears he had ever shed, and would have walked away, had not the good-natured foreman, seeing him turn to do so, called to him to stop, and asked what he wanted.

"I want to find out if there's any chance for me to get a job," he blubbered.

"What wages do you want?" asked the foreman.

"What you think I can earn," answered the other, too much humbled to chaffer about pay.

"When do you want to come on?"

"I don't know what that means."

"When do you want to begin to work?"

"Now."

"That's funny," the other exclaimed, fa-

vorably impressed by such promptness. "I never before saw a creeker who was willing to come on a job before the next day. But where do you expect to board?"

"Can't I live along with you?"

"Me!—oh no," replied the foreman; "but some of the men take a boarder or two. Ho! Nick Roth," he added, calling to him one of the shovelers, with whom he conversed for a few minutes in German. But Roth looked at Bob, and thought of what Mrs. Roth would say to his bringing home a boarder so forlorn, and finally shook his head and begged to be excused, and so did several other Germans, one after the other; and Bob's case again looked dark, when at last Tom Horrigan, a kind-hearted Irishman, moved to pity by the very appearance that caused the others to turn their backs on the poor fellow, volunteered to receive him into his own overcrowded family of ten children.

"There's my house over there," said Tom, pointing to a cabin across the ravine. "It's too late for you to make a quarter to-day, so you can't come on till to-morrow. You go over there, and tell Mrs. Horrigan you're comin' to live wid us, and she'll help wash the dirt off you, and give you a bite to eat, if you're too hungry to wait for supper."

So spake an Irishman! How can a people possessing sympathy and generosity such as the Irish are endowed with ever hope to thrive in a world like this?

The Horrigan family lived in a sufficiently unconstrained manner not to abash Bob when he first became one of them. But it was a pleasant family, and from Mrs. Horrigan herself down to the six-weeks-old at her breast (excepting one who took after the father) was a family of beauties, all showing that white skin and delicate bloom for which the Irish peasantry are famous, and which seems bestowed to display in picturesque contrast the war-paint of dirt which large families of poor children are apt to wear—especially Irish poor children. They lived well, for their head was a water-drinker, and earned extra wages; and Bob, who had insisted on fasting until the abundant supper was spread, had sufficient "occasion" to consume a full share of it. After the day's experiences, he could wonder at nothing; but he *thought the saying of grace at the beginning*

of the meal, and Tom's smoking a pipe at the end, just as if he were a woman, were worthy of notice. In the Creek country only women smoke, while men chew.

On beginning work next morning Bob's protector gave him a barrow and shovel, and taught him the fine art of handling dirt so as to obtain the largest result with the least expenditure of power.

"Take holt," said Tom, "wid your right hand just back of the bend, and take the handle in your left—so; now shove it under the dirt, keeping the blade close down to the stone—so; now pry up the load you've got by bearing down wid the left hand, bearing first on the heel of the blade and afterward on your right hand, which you don't raise till you've got all clear and the shovel is brought to a level; and then lift wid both hands just high enough for it to clear the rim of your barrow—so; now don't pitch it in, but hold steady your right and twist wid your left, and the dirt will tumble in of itself—don't you see?"

If poor Hugh Miller, when he did his first day's work in a quarry, had been thus considerably instructed in the manual of his implement, he would have suffered less than he tells us he did from tired muscles and blistered hands. Fortunately for our hero, he had been better hardened to labor than the young geologist, thanks to which and his learning aptly, he got through the day with no damage greater than a back-ache when sundown came.

As one day came and went, so came and went another, and the weeks, and the months. Bob pleased his employer, became a pet of the men, liked the work, and was happy, except for occasional dreams and passing clouds. His wages were fixed at one dollar and a quarter a day, being only a quarter of a dollar less than was paid to "full hands," as empty-handed poor folk are sometimes called. Loss of time on account of rain being deducted, his earnings averaged about six dollars a week, out of which he must pay four for his weekly board, leaving him only two dollars to buy new clothes with; and as his old ones were too dirty to wash and too ragged to mend, and as, moreover, to give credit to a creeker was a thing unheard of in the village store, his plight would have been intolerable, if th

good Irishman had not declined to receive any thing of him until such a time as his earnings should re-establish equilibrium in his finances. Thus Bob was early enabled to supply himself with a flannel shirt, a pair of shoes, and a pair of breeches: the old coat and remnant of a hat could be made to do a little longer. At Mrs. Horrigan's express requirement, Bob adopted the custom of washing his face and hands and combing his hair before every meal, though he found it impossible to discover the sense of doing so. The influence of the family upon him was humanizing; especially so was their fun and mirth. Bob improved in appearance, and grew sleek as well as clean; and when, at the end of six weeks, he got square with the world, and treated himself to a second-hand hat, he actually found favor in the deep blue eyes of Bridget Horrigan, aged fourteen, a beauty with milk-white teeth, peach-like cheeks, brow of wax, and auburn hair, who had at first utterly and from the depths of her bosom scorned him. And Bob, on his part, with Bridget so much before his eyes, was little by little being taught what until then not sunrise nor sunset, nor the bridal apparel of his native woods at spring-time nor their royal array in autumn, nor rainbows nor wild flowers, had availed to teach him—namely, the meaning and the power of beauty.

But a change came. The priest who sometimes officiated at the village chapel became interested in the Horrigan family—partly on account of the father's worth, partly because the mother was pious, but chiefly, it may be boldly said, for the reason that the children were so very pretty—and obtained for Tom a situation as private watchman in an iron-foundry at Cincinnati; and in two months from the time when Bob first crossed their threshold, the whole family were on their way to that city. Bridget wept copiously at bidding Bob good-by, and he "filled up," as they say, though he didn't run over. Two months more, maybe, had done the business for him; as it was, he returned to the desolate cabin heart-sore enough. He found a German family had taken possession and

were moving in. They made no objection to receive him as a boarder, but stipulated that he should aid them on Sundays and wet days in the labor necessary to put the house in more tenantable condition than had sufficed for its Irish occupants.

The new home in which Bob found himself was different from the old one in important respects, not the least of which were soup, sour-kraut, sausages, and an unknown tongue: strange things to him all of them were, and hard to know and admire. The degree of economy and thrift, of order and neatness, too, which prevailed were difficult for him to understand or tolerate. Mr. Gottel, who governed in all things, on returning from the quarry would inspect the house narrowly to learn if his "frau," in his absence, had worked as diligently as he had himself been doing, and would even examine the washing and ironing departments. He knew as soon as he tasted the soup if it had been boiled slowly and long, as it should be, or quickly and but a short time, as it should not, and judged the bread with a taste as discriminating as it was severe. If aught was found amiss, he would scold his wife as if she were a child; in grave cases he would even beat her—all which discipline she in turn visited on the children; yet neither what she suffered nor what she inflicted seemed to imbrute her moral nature, or render Mrs. Gottel otherwise than a cheerful, buxom, good-hearted wife and mother.

The influences that now surrounded the boy were quieting and regulating—in short, just what he needed. Besides what Mrs. Horrigan had taught him, Mrs. Gottel insisted on his giving up the practice of chewing tobacco, just begun, and that he should keep his shoes clean, and wear shirts of blue check, which he must change twice a week. Then she required he should perform various ceremonies relating to greetings and leave-takings, deference to elders, attention to guests of the house, behavior at table, and so forth, all which he found hard to do and thought useless. But before many months he felt grateful to her for the discipline.



CHAPTER V.

"Oh eyes, strange eyes, ye are a world
Where unseen spirits tread,
Upon whose banners, half unfurled,
The future may be read."



THE spring of the year 1865, that saw the close of the war, saw also the departure of Bob Hagan from the quarries, a much improved youth. In the school of labor and of civilization where he had passed the winter he had made commendable progress, evincing a capacity for improvement that would enable him to rise in the world, should circumstances be favorable. That capacity for improvement must be borne in mind as being an essential element in his character, and a ruling one in his future history. The colt, too, thanks to its owner's self-denial, had wintered well, but it would need during the coming season better pasturage than the quarry hills afforded, and such would best be found on some of the great farms of the river bottoms, where horse raising was largely carried on. So, for the sake of his protégé, Bob resolved on a new departure; and one morning late in April he asked for the small balance of wages that was due him, bade good-by to his companions in toil and of the household, and descended the hill, leading a good deal larger colt and carrying a heavier bundle than when he first ascended it five months before.

Taking the road down the river, he looked out as he went for handsome houses with large farm buildings, and as often as he came near one of such would go in and inquire if there was "any chance of a job" there for him. Repeated refusals did not discourage him, for he knew there must be room somewhere for a willing worker with strong hands; he was not "seeking his fortune," as young men are said to do when they go forth to shun hand-work, not to find it. He was not trusting to luck, but only looking for his place, and felt sure of finding it ere long. Still, it was fatiguing to make so many excursions from the main road to the river-side, where the good houses were mostly to be found; and after he had got as far as eight or nine miles from Buena Vista, and within a mile or so of one of the hundred American towns named Rome, he decided to halt. The place he chose was an open space that lay between the road and the foot of a cliff on its right, and though too small to be inclosed, was large enough to afford a good bite of spring grass for the colt. The cliff was one of a series which in that place began to present themselves, jutting boldly out from the hills that run along the land side of the road, and indicate, with the diminished height of the hills, their more gentle slopes, and a general softening of the face of nature, a transition from a sandstone to a limestone base. They are outcroppings of a bed of magnesian lime rock so compact and regular in form, with such level lines of foot-

ing and coping, that they might be mistaken for remains of Roman walls or feudal castles, whose void places in our American landscape they very respectably fill. Indeed, to one who will but try to think so, they are as agreeable objects as any crumbling Roman stone fences or tumble-down medieval dwelling-houses. Nor was the cliff at whose foot Bob rested wanting in aught that nature can furnish to beautify decay. Virginia ivy, rooted wherever it found protection, clambered over its face, and every hollow or projection where soil had accumulated formed a natural vase of ferns, flowers, grass, or whatever plant had been wafted there in the seed. A group of beech-trees crowned the brow of the cliff, and a copious spring issued from its base, and made a brook that ran across the road. While the colt grazed, its master, seated on a log on the opposite side of the road, made his own meal of some bread and bacon and hard-boiled eggs, which Mrs. Gottel had placed in his bag when she bade him good-by, and then took a good long draught of cold water at the spring, resting on his hands and knees while drinking.

Resuming his seat to wait until the colt should get satisfied, he very naturally, for one in his situation, turned his mind's eye in the direction of the future. Not seeing much there, he turned and looked back toward the past, and there the first vision to rise was that of Bridget Horrigan. "But wasn't she handsome, though?" he said to himself. "What blue eyes she had! It seemed as if they could look right straight through a fellow, and not hurt him any, neither." Then, suddenly, with a sensation as if an icicle had pierced him, came the recollection of another pair of eyes, whose aspect, as soft at first as that of Bridget's, had, while yet he looked upon them, altered to that of a tiger, and made him feel that blood cried out against him from the ground. The carpet-bag lay beside him, and was open. An impulse, often felt before, though always resisted, forced him now to put in his hand and seize and unclasp the portrait case. With a shudder he looked. There was nothing there but the face of a child and the open, frank eyes of a child, which, far from taking any vengeful expression, seemed to soften

and brighten as they met his own, and smile upon him with a living intelligence and kindness, and, even as living orbs might do, to vary each moment they looked, till they became radiant with a meaning of love, or loving friendship, or gratitude, or all. Startled, amazed, fascinated, he strained his vision to receive every ray that was beaming from the magical picture, though a convulsive agitation almost shook it from his grasp, until bursting tears dissolved the enchantment, and nothing remained but a simple portrait, upon whose glass incasement the great hot drops were falling and splashing.

All which had prevented his being aware that a horse had stopped to drink at the brook, whose rider, a girl of sixteen, attracted by his singular agitation, was curiously observing him. She was plainly attired, but handsome, with heavy black tresses, and dark, deep eyes, no whit less potent than those which were so moving his very soul. As, gradually coming to himself, the youth looked up and saw her, he started to his feet, moved falteringly a few paces forward, and gasped out, so low as to be scarcely heard, "Who are you? Tell me who you be, now! Tell me quick, now! Oh, do!"

And who was she, in the name of wonder?

The girl of the portrait! with the same manifold eyes, only wiser and sweeter from three years of ripening, regarding him with blended sympathy, curiosity, and amusement.

His address startled her, and a slight flash of anger came that for an instant recalled the tiger glance of old, while something in the lines of the brow, in its partial effort to contract, brought up a face he had hoped, and even prayed, he might never see again, either waking or sleeping; but recovering herself quickly, while she drew in the loosened rein, she looked full in his eyes, and in tones befitting her type of face, with its brunette tint, arching brows, Roman nose, short upper and full under lip, even teeth, and strong chin, replied, with a sad dignity, "*A prisoner of war!*" Then, turning, struck her steed, which started off galloping down the road. An hour later her questioner, who had not, meanwhile, even though with intense study, discovered in the reply any solution of the mystery of either the one ap-



"WHO ARE YOU? TELL ME WHO YOU BE, NOW!"

partition or the other, was leading the colt in the same direction, going in search of his "job" and his destiny. At the end of another hour of fruitless self-bewilderment, to the entire neglect of the job, though perhaps in the full pursuit of the destiny, he became aware he had forgotten his business, and stopped to observe where he was. He was opposite a gate which opened from the highway into a private road that conducted, by a straight line across the bottom, to a house about a mile distant that stood on a slight swell of ground near to and fronting on the river. Contrary to usage in that new country, whose axe and rifle bearing settlers deemed their vocation was, first of all things, to fell trees and kill Indians, and would as soon have thought of raising broods of the latter as new plantations of the former, the avenue was bordered with large buckeye-trees, equally the pride of the Ohio wilderness and the gardens of the Champs Elysées. It was, besides, made more attractive as well as useful by a covering of gravel, and by thorough ditching at the sides. The house, seen at the end of the vista, was peculiar too, in being built not of logs, or boards, or brick, but of

stone; and though devoid of architectural ornament, except what resulted from the useful and comfortable additions of a piazza in the rear, a two-story porch in the front, and an open belvedere on the roof, was—by virtue of its liberal proportions, the material used in its construction, and the outside aid of a commanding site decked with old trees, besides a garden before it, where in summertime sunflowers and hollyhocks grew—a most respectable and manor-like habitation, as it was a credit to the mason who built it, namely, the late Governor Metcalfe, of Kentucky. When Bob appeared at the back-door and inquired of a young girl who came to answer his knock if there was any chance for him to get a job, he took off his hat, as he had done that day each time he made a like application. Mrs. Gottel had taught him that German trick of the hat; and though he had, while with her, often rebelled against her instructions, yet as she had on parting carefully explained that it would help him to obtain employment with the right kind of people, he had, for the occasion, consented to practice it. As he stood, hat in hand, decently clad, and with frank and manly bearing, there was

certainly no objection to be made on the score of personal appearance.

The young girl, pretty as he was, and that is saying a good deal, did not scruple to look at him closely; then with an "I'll see," she disappeared. A man of fifty-five years returned with her presently, who scanned the applicant even more closely; after which he said, "So you want a job, my lad. What wages do you expect?"

"I want what you think I can earn after I've worked with you a while. But can you board my colt?"

"Oh yes; but I shall have to charge you something. You can't raise a horse for nothing, I suppose you know, in these times. Let us have a look at him." Then walking around the new object of scrutiny, with whose points he seemed pleased, he asked, "What breed is he?"

"He came of one of the mares that John Morgan's men rode when they made their raid."

"That isn't a bad pedigree. Those fellows were better mounted than them that followed after 'em. Suppose you call him a Morgan horse; though he carries his head and bends his neck mighty like a Stockbridge Chief, and he's the color of Stockbridge too."

The farmer then turned his attention again to Bob, and asked him several questions, which being satisfactorily answered, he consented to take him on trial, and, if his work suited, to pay him, besides boarding and washing and keeping the colt, the sum of ten dollars a month. The young "Morgan" was turned into a rye pasture near the house, where he soon testified his appreciation of the new arrangement, by eating voraciously and frisking extravagantly, while his master was shown to a large garret room in which were beds for six persons, and, having deposited his effects, was afterward taken to the barn and set to work at chopping sheaf oats in a hay-cutter.

Mr. Damarin, the owner of the house, and of the farm (measuring just one mile square) to which it pertained, derived his name and a portion of his blood from one of the unhappy French emigrants whose fortunes were wrecked in the attempt to establish a settlement on the Ohio near Gallipolis—an

attempt which failed, owing to a deficiency, common to all their nation, of what may be called the emigrating faculty, or the faculty of being able to endure a painful existence for the sole benefit and advantage of posterity. The father of Bob's employer, who left France when he was but a boy, and who drifted down stream with what little he could save from the wreck, till he tied his boat opposite where the stone house was afterward built, had found it possible to become a backwoodsman, and after a life of hardship was able to leave to the only child that remained to him the very pretty farm of "Stone House." The son, although blessed with five children to provide for, had found it easier to settle each one of the three eldest on as large and rich a farm as his own, by purchasing wild land for them in the further West and sending them out to be their own pioneers, than his father had to provide for but one. The youngest boy, for whom the home farm was reserved, had, of course, entered the army when the war began, and had steadily risen from the grade of lieutenant to that of colonel, with a brevet of brigadier-general. His regiment would soon be mustered out of service, and his return to his home was the great event of the immediate future of the Damarin family.

Mrs. Damarin and her daughter Polly (the girl who met Bob at the door) had every day, since news of the mustering out came, enjoyed a good cry and a good laugh over the happiness that was coming, without either of them being able to tell which they enjoyed most, the laugh or the cry. Mrs. Damarin was a Kentucky woman, from Mason County. She was handsome, and had always been handsome; was healthy, and had always been so; was cheerful and vivacious, because healthy, handsome, and good; was an excellent wife, mother, and housekeeper. She thought she believed in Old-School Presbyterianism, and was sure she did in the very theological Breckinridge of her native State. Her height was five feet ten inches, and her weight one hundred and eighty pounds. There are many such in Kentucky, and if there were more such in other States, well would it be for America.

Polly bade fair to become as handsome a

woman as her mother, and as large, though unlike her in many respects. The girl's hair was auburn-red, and her eyes of a warm brown color that suited the hair. She was at the brother-worshipping age of fifteen; and

now that her idol was about to be restored to her, her happiness knew no alloy, save from the persistent refusal of her sole school-mate, companion, and friend, Bella Johnston, to be happy too.

CHAPTER VI.

"What though her angry glances dart,
She's hawk in eye, but dove in heart."

THE eyes the poor boy had beheld that day had been too much for him and too many; an excellent cure for his dazement and amazement, then, was the discipline of grinding for an hour at the crank of the hay-cutter. The monotony of the motion soothed his senses, and the labor of it opened his pores and quieted his nerves, while the sharp look-out constantly needed to save his fingers from being chopped in pieces withdrew his thoughts from wool-gathering, and fixed them on the practical business of the hour, which was chopping oats. When the horn sounded for supper he followed the other farm people to the washing-place by the cistern, on the back piazza, and there, taking his turn, washed, combed, and dusted; then entered with the rest the large kitchen, where a long table was profusely spread. At the upper end of the board the family of the employer were placing themselves, while the employed took their seats at the foot, all as in feudal times, only the fare was such as feudal castles could seldom dispense: for was not this in the lap of the Ohio, and was not a Kentucky matron president of the household?

Without taking his eyes off his plate, Robert accepted and ate all that was offered him by those sitting near, and rose at the end with a consciousness that his new start in life was being made under most favorable auspices. Following his companions out of the house, he strolled with them to their habitual place of resort for rest and gossip during hours of leisure. It was on the bank of the river, without the gate of the flower garden in front of the house. A bench had been made by turning upside down an old dug-out canoe, on which those found seats who did not prefer to lie on the clean grass

or lounge against the trunks and roots of the great old apple-trees that shaded the place. These trees were the only survivors of a flourishing orchard that formerly stood at the back of the log-cabin built some sixty years before by the first proprietor; all their fellows, following the fate of both the cabin and a frame house that succeeded it before Stone House was built, had one by one been undermined by the continually widening river, and swept away on its swift current. The ruins of the brick chimney of the frame building still lay on the shore, fifty paces out from the foot of the steep clay bluff that formed the river's bank, which rose to a height of thirty feet above its gravelly base, that made the shore, and sixty feet above the level of "low water." Before bed-time the new-comer had made good progress in getting acquainted with his future comrades.

Early next morning Mr. Damarin gave Robert, as he preferred to call Bob, his orders for the day, and explained the routine of work specially allotted to him. Among other things, he was to rub down, saddle, and bring to the door soon after breakfast every day two of the horses for the use of "the girls," who, it seemed, daily rode over to the parsonage, about four miles distant, where they received private instruction from the excellent and also reverend Mr. Adamsfall, a Union refugee from the valley of the Holston, and the officiating clergyman of the church where the Damarin family attended. One of the girls was Polly Damarin, and the other Bella Johnston. Prompt to the hour, Robert led the steeds to the horse-block, and having tied one of them near by, held the other beside the block. Presently the girls appeared. Polly, coming first, greeted the timid fellow with one smile for

recognition, and three for his awkwardness. After she was, by his truly awkward help, mounted, he led up the other horse for the other girl, resolving as he did so to commit none of the blunders he did in his first attempt, but making as many others in their stead.

"There, that 'll do, thank you. I've got it now. Let go, please," exclaimed a voice he had heard before. The steed flung his head free from the hand that still clutched the bridle at the bit, without power to obey the request to let go, and cantered away with—the girl of the portrait—the prisoner of war!

During that forenoon Robert resolved a score of times to run away, each time in a different direction, and as often altered his mind. His uncertainty arose from mere inability to fathom his own emotions, and understand why he should wish to go. Being, of course, destitute of any notion of the romantic, though his heart cried out "Run," his head could perceive no reason why it should transmit the command to his heels; so he staid. But he suffered horribly; and when at length the two young horsewomen on their return came in sight, racing with each other down the avenue, he went out to meet them with the feelings of one who advances perforce to receive a third visit from a ghost. But the girls had come home in gleesome mood, and under cover of their merry nonsense he was able to attend to his duty. And the daily recurrence of that duty, which he learned to perform better and better each time, became before many days the chief pleasure of his existence, and, more than that, the efficient means of his elevation and advancement. The girls soon began to take notice of their humble attendant, and in time learned to like him. Conversing occasionally with him, they began to feel an interest in knowing his history, and put him questions on that point, which he evading to answer, they became even more interested in his mystery. They gave him advice, which it is to be hoped was well considered on their part, for, were it good or bad, he was sure to follow it. Thus he became a regular attendant at church, and when one day they detected him with a quid of tobacco thrust in one cheek, before Bella had half done storming at him the weed was discarded, and

forever. They discovered one day he was absolutely unable to read, and thenceforth his instruction in reading, writing, and ciphering became their daily business and his very great pleasure; and as he had uncommon aptitude, there is nothing wonderful in the fact that, with such helping, he learned what was essential in all three studies before the end of a twelvemonth.

But twelve months is a good way ahead of our story. Bella had called herself a prisoner of war. The reason why she insisted on giving herself that singular designation will be found in the following extract from a letter written by Colonel (then Captain) Damarin, dated from Northern Alabama in the spring of 1862, and addressed to his parents:

"...We have overrun a good deal more ground than we are able to hold, and must soon prepare to get out of this; indeed, we are doing so now. I have found myself a good deal embarrassed by a charge which Providence seems to have cast upon me in a singular manner. Two weeks ago, while employed on detached service with three companies of our regiment, under my command, we came upon some of Turchin's men just as they were about to sack a seminary for young ladies, situated about thirty miles from here, the inmates of which we were able to save from frightful treatment. Among the scholars was a girl from South Carolina thirteen years old. Soon after we expelled the ruffians, and while a squad of our men were guarding the place, my command was attacked by the rebels, and though we managed to drive them off—no thanks to Turchin's fellows, who ran at the first fire—it some way happened in the confusion of the fight that this poor child received a disabling wound, though not a very severe one, and got separated from her companions, who escaped to the protection of the attacking force, while she remained in our hands. And as we were compelled, a few days afterward, to abandon our position and fall back to the river at this point, she had to be brought along, and was placed with our own wounded on board a transport steamer used as a hospital. To-day it is determined to send this transport home with a load of the more serious sufferers, and as the country about here is in a dreadful condition, overrun by stragglers from both armies and by gangs of disorderly negroes, and as there is much confusion and uncertainty in all our movements just now, I see no better way than to leave her on board, and let her go with the rest to Cincinnati, in the hope that my dear father will be so good as to meet her there, and see that she is kindly treated and put in a safe way to be returned to her home, which is somewhere on the Waccamaw River. The surgeon in charge has promised she shall remain on board the boat until father can get this letter and go down to receive her.

"She is a pretty and very intelligent little creature, but full of the strangest notions, and a good deal of a spitfire.

"One of my men insists that she was in the act of firing a pistol at our party from the ranks of the assailing force when she received her wound; but I can hardly believe it. However this may be, she hates and scorns us as only a she-rebel can, and, in fact, is more violent than any I ever met. Would you believe it? she has taken up the idea that we captured her in battle, and that she is actually a prisoner of war! Nothing I could say had the least effect in dispelling the notion, or abating her extreme rancor, and she parts from us as from her mortal foes. But please do not let this at all prejudice you against the poor unfortunate child. For me, it is rather amusing than otherwise.

"I can not write more. The steward of the boat is John Grooms, a Brush Creek boy, and he will dispatch this letter as soon as he gets to Cincinnati. He will also hand you two hundred dollars—a portion of my pay lately received, and which I beg you will use, so far as may be necessary, for the benefit of the 'prisoner.'"

On receiving the above letter both Mr. and Mrs. Damarin went at once to Cincinnati, and brought back to Stone House with them the wounded and disabled but uncompromisingly rebellious Miss Bella Johnston. The kindness with which they nursed her might have mollified one who had been less thoroughly grounded in the gospel of State rights, nullification, and secession; but no freshly caught tiger's cub ever proved more untamable than she. Though evidently an affectionate child, thoughts of parents and home, so naturally present to one in her situation, seemed really to give precedence to thoughts of the war, of the part her native State had in it, and of that State's grandeur and chivalry, its sovereignty and nationality.

All this, which seemed so ridiculous to her protectors, who had only that weak sentiment of sectionalism which prevailed in the Northern Border States, was the result of efficient causes—of teachings whose character and object all the world now understands, acting upon a peculiarly ardent and self-devoting nature. It was nothing less than the much glorified national or provincial egotism called patriotism, pure and exalted; patriotism, hot and furious; patriotism, blind and gone astray; but still patriotism of the very same quality with that which moved Joan of Arc and Charlotte Corday to do unladylike things, and make themselves conspicu-

ous—and Charlotte and Joan were much older girls than Bella.

She soon recovered of the wound, and when she became fully aware they were laughing at her in earnest, learned to hide her feelings, and covered up the fire of her wrath under the ashes of her desolation, where they smouldered in secret, with only an occasional gleam or flash, which would sometimes burst out when the family conversed in her presence, as they freely did, concerning the war and the tidings of its progress. But it almost killed her to sustain the pressure of the moral atmosphere in which she was, that bore down upon her breast and brain as with the weight of innumerable pounds to every square inch of their surfaces. And the result was an anomalous mental and moral condition, which ended in producing a character needing to be judged with charity in order to be judged justly.

One of Bella's faults—and the hardest of all to forgive—was her not feeling, or at least not manifesting any sense of, her dependent relation to the Damarin family. She had not scrupled on her first coming, and repeatedly afterward, to declare she could consider them only as enemies of her country, whom it was her highest duty to hate. Nevertheless, while earnestly trying to perform this patriotic duty, she could not help finding out before she had been with them long the goodness of her two elder foes, and the loveliness of the younger one, who insisted on loving and making love to her whether she would or not; and in the end became truly attached to all three, though perhaps without knowing it; and with the exception of occasional scenes of unpleasantness, her deportment was that of an adopted daughter. For Captain Damarin, however—her captor, as she deemed him—she was better able to retain her cherished ill-will, since he remained constantly in the field, and down to the close of the war did not once return home.

A great grief was added to Bella's cup after her arrival at Stone House. Mr. Damarin made faithful efforts to communicate with her family, in order that he might restore her to them. Nothing was elicited until after more than a year, when a letter was

received from the overseer of the plantation of Mr. Johnston. It stated that the gentleman in question had three months before undertaken to run through the blockade in a schooner laden with his crop of rice; that he was supposed to have escaped capture, but had not since been heard from; that anxiety on his account, and grief for the supposed death of her daughter, had caused Mrs. Johnston to fall ill and die; that no near relations of the family remained in the neighborhood; that the two brothers of Bella were officers under John Morgan when he made his raid, and were thought to have been killed or to have escaped across the Ohio River during the fight at Bluffington Island, as their names were not on the list of those captured.

After this letter was received there seemed nothing further to be done, since, if Mr. Johnston or either one of his sons were living, and should return to Waccamaw, he would be sure to learn news of Bella, and

make proper exertion to recover her. In expectation of hearing from some of them, the remaining months and years had gone by, leaving a strong presumption in the minds of Mr. Damarin and his family, though not in Bella's, that all were dead. And now the war had ended, though she was urgent to be sent forthwith to her home, and was at the same time in daily hopes of seeing some one from there come and claim her, Mr. Damarin was in doubt what steps to pursue, and waited, and urged the impetuous girl to wait, until his son could return and give his counsel. In this last he had no little trouble, since the strongest reason for delay, namely, the one which was derived from the presumption that all her family were dead, could not be told her; and she was at times more difficult to manage than ever before.

And thus matters stood at the time when Robert Hagan obtained employment at Stone House.





CHAPTER VII.

"In fighting-men the battle's flowing blood
Quenches war's rage as fire is quenched by flood."

A LITTLE later—it was in the early days of May—a steamboat stopped at "Damarin's Landing," just after dawn, to put on shore a passenger; and the long hoped for pet and pride of the family was received into the arms of his mother, father, and sister.

The wonderful transformation which youths undergo in a collegiate course of learning and dissipation has been a common theme for novelists, though the plowboy-poet says they only

"Gang in stirks and come out asses;"

but here was a change worthy to be contemplated. Four years before, the subject of it had left Stone House as much of a plowboy as Burns himself, with only a good school education and only farm-house manners. He returned, at the age of twenty-four, with every aspect of a thorough-bred soldier, used to command, and tutored in self-reliance and self-respect. He had seen something, too, of the social world, and though he could not claim the polite distinction of being a man of the world, was yet very far from being the boy of the farm he was when, at the fall of Sumter, he buckled to his side the first sword he had ever beheld in his life. His face was decidedly handsome, with large blue eyes, a Roman nose, a mouth whose well-defined shape the full wavy beard he wore could not hide, dark chestnut hair, and a complexion naturally fair.

Tall, full chested, well proportioned, and well jointed, he was of that Northwestern pattern of man upon which nature, working under free conditions and on a virginal soil, has modeled ten millions of people, who sufficiently prove that the human race need not degenerate in America. Men of such a type *can never be clownish, nor can any thing*

short of positively bad bringing up render one of them awkward. Having no idea of social inequality among neighbors, their manners are based on a sense of justice, and like the maple and walnut trees of their forests, though rough in bark, they are fine in grain, and capable of receiving any degree of polish.

When Bella, hearing of the arrival, rose and dressed herself to go down and do obeisance to her captor, she made her little toilet with some care; for to say that she was indifferent to the impression she would make on him were to say what has never been true of any female captive since Cleopatra captivated Cæsar.

But, for all that, she hated him—persistently, and on principle—and conceived her duty to South Carolina also required of her to despise him and his family for their low birth and inferior breeding, though her own superior breeding taught her to keep this last sentiment to herself. She was glad he was come, for now she hoped to be allowed to go directly to her home, and yet dreaded the awkwardness of meeting him; and for that reason did not make her appearance until all the family were seated at breakfast. He rose, however, as soon as she entered the room—rose like a real gentleman, as it struck her—and went and took her hand as if it were that of an old friend, though he had evident difficulty to restrain a smile at her excessive dignity and reserve. There was no going to school that day for Polly, and one girl never went without the other. But Bella could bear no part in the family holiday, so wandered into the garden, and through it into the old orchard on the river's bank, where, seating herself on the canoe bench that has been named, she flung off⁺



"AND SO REMAINED, SAYING NOT A WORD."

sun-bonnet which her head was becoming too hot to bear, and remained moodily regarding the opposite Kentucky shore, while her thoughts, following the direction of her eyes, went southward too; but while her eyes lingered on the great hill-side, where the opening flowers of the redbud and dogwood flecked with pink and white the young green surface of awakening vegetation, her thoughts traveled far beyond, to the land where the ilex and magnolia waited for no spring to renew their evergreen robes, to the land where violets and roses had bloomed months before, and to her home of long ago, made beautiful by them all. Southward, southward she looked for deliverance, and southward went her hopes, her prayers, and complaints. Where was her father, that he *came not for his child*? or her brothers, that *they came not for their sister*? And those

in the house heard her calling aloud the names of her brothers, and hushed their conversation to listen and sympathize.

The general asked his sister to go to her friend; but Polly waited till the outcry ceased to be audible—for she well knew how Bella should be treated—and then went and sat down beside her, glided an arm round her waist, laid the drooping head against her own, and so remained, saying not a word.

A skiff, crossing from the Kentucky shore, and which the five-mile current had carried far down stream, now approached near enough to where the girls sat for the persons in it to be observed. The passenger who was being ferried over was a young man of medium size, dressed in a Confederate uniform, from which the gilt cord and other insignia had been removed. His hat was slouched and somewhat torn, and his boots

were of reddish cowhide, into the tops of which the pantaloons were tucked. As the boat touched land, the stranger, taking a small valise in his hand, stepped on shore, turned and looked about, asked a few questions of the boatman as the latter was rowing away, and then began to ascend the bank. But he did not take the path which would have led up to the house: he took a road which, sloping round into a ravine that came to the river some little distance to the right of the house, conducted by a wide circuit to the avenue behind it, and in that way to the highway beyond, the road in question being the public way to the ferry, of which Mr. Damarin was proprietor.

He had not gone many steps, however, when Bella, who had started to her feet and been watching him with increasing agitation from the moment he came near enough for her to discern the color of his clothes, flew down the pathway, and flung herself on his breast, crying, "Brother! brother! brother!" and, as if unable to utter any other than that dear word, continued to repeat it in every possible intonation of affection and joy.

The brother—for such, indeed, he was—as soon as he could disengage himself so as to see her face, exclaimed, with equal delight, and greater surprise: "Bella! My God! is it you, safe and alive? My poor, sweet, dear little sister, alive and safe—and here?"

"I knew you would come for me, Charles," she said, with her arms still about him, and her cheek pressed to his shoulder. "I knew some of you would—you, or Edward, or father. And where are they? Where is father? Have they killed him, as they did mother?"

"You knew of mother's death, then? But—yes," he added, evasively, "Ned is well now. He was badly hurt twice; but he's well now."

"And father?" broke in Bella, impetuously.

He renewed his kisses, while thinking on what he should say; then resumed:

"Bella, my darling, you are a true Carolina girl, are you not? We of the South have got hardened in suffering and disaster, have we not? Tidings of death have been our daily news for so long—"

"When did he die?" said the girl, as,

drawing away from her brother, she stood and regarded him with apparent calmness.

"Father soon followed mother," was the reply.

She remained for a few moments still as a statue, save for the violent heaving of her bosom, as if exerting a powerful will to master a powerful emotion. At length, flinging up her arms and eyes, and exclaiming, hoarsely, "An orphan!" she cast herself on the ground, and clutched her fingers deep into the sand. And there she lay, breathing heavily, but without uttering word or moan. Her brother would have raised her up, but while he stooped to do so, Polly, who had remained aloof till she saw Bella fall, and had then swiftly but quietly approached, laid a gentle hand on his arm, saying, as he turned toward her, "Please, Sir, let her be as she is; it's the best way to do when she has such a turn. We always leave her to herself. You are her brother, Sir?"

"I am, miss; and may I ask how my sister happened to find protection where they know how to treat her so kindly and considerately?"

And while Bella lay with her face to the earth, Polly told, in simple terms, the story the reader already knows, and told it with such effect that her listener, when it was done, realized how happy a refuge the orphan and exile had found—far better than she herself seemed to realize it.

"And we all love her," the farmer's daughter continued; "yes, indeed, every one of us; and now we shall be so glad you have come, for she did long for you so much. And you'll take her back to Multiflora, to her own beautiful, grand home she has told me all about. I know it's ever so much better than the one we have been able to give her here. And she'll be so happy to be with you all there; but"—and here the sobs came—"it will break our hearts to part with her. I'm sure it will mine."

And seating herself on the ground by her friend, she, contrary to her own prescription, put both arms about her waist and raised her up. Bella turned and stared at Polly as if she had never known her. After a little while, however, she appeared to come to herself, and approaching her burning lips to those of her comforter, kissed them; the

looking in her eyes, found there the best medicine for her own tearless distress—namely, love and sympathy and weeping; and seated on the shore, they both wept together.

For many minutes Charles Johnston walked back and forth on the shore by the water's edge, with folded arms and fixed look, as if in anxious consultation with himself. Suddenly he stopped, as if he had decided what course to pursue, and, taking his valise in his hand, mounted by the path to the top of the bank, and opening the garden gate, approached the house. He was received at the door by Mr. Damarin, to whom he made himself known as Captain Johnston, of the Confederate army, and who invited him to enter the parlor, where he was presented to Mrs. Damarin and the general. Addressing himself more particularly to Mrs. Damarin, he proceeded to thank them all in the most appropriate manner for their goodness to his sister. "You have been a mother, madam," he concluded, "to an orphan girl; to a creature more needing protection than the most helpless infant you have filled the part of the protector the most needed of all others; and may God Almighty bless you for it!" He then explained that himself and brother had just returned from the only visit to their home they had been able to make since the death of their father, in 1863.

"Your father is, then, no longer living?" interrupted Mr. Damarin.

"No, Sir; he died not far from here, as I will explain." The young man then went on to say that they had found the plantation in such a condition—its mills and barns burned, and the house at Multiflora stripped of every thing, even to books and papers, and occupied by about fifty of the late slaves—that nothing could be done to reclaim the property without a considerable capital, whereas they had none at all. He had therefore come to the North to search for the proceeds of the cargo of rice (which must have sold for more than thirty thousand dollars in gold), and which he knew it was his father's intention to place in safe hands somewhere outside of the Confederacy, to remain as a resource in case of the very disaster that had occurred. It was at the time when Morgan's *raid was being turned into a retreat* that Mr.

Johnston had surprised his son, who held command in the raiding forces, by joining them, and asking permission to accompany the march, which he expected would escort him safely through the Federal lines on his way home.

From this down to the time of his death, which took place on the day following, the exigencies of the movement had permitted little conversation between him and them. He was shot by a bush-whacker, and died soon after, without recovering consciousness. No paper or memorandum had been found to give any clew to the disposition made of the funds, and the only filament of one they possessed was the surname merely of a friend of their father, with whom he had sometimes corresponded. His name was Richardson, and his residence was then, or formerly, in Chicago; he was a banker, they thought. The captain's brother, Major Edward Johnston, had come with him as far as the new oil-fields in West Virginia, where he had remained to look for employment.

Most appropriately to the story would have come a request for Bella to be permitted to remain where she was until her brother returned from his errand of search; but this was prevented by Mr. and Mrs. Damarin both speaking at once, and begging she might be left with them, not merely till then, but until such time as a better home could be provided for her elsewhere, to which he was only too glad to consent.

"Where are the girls?" exclaimed the general, rather abruptly. "Shall we not go, captain, and look them up?" And he led the way into the garden, where, walking slowly, and speaking in a low tone, he continued: "I know very well how hard the fortunes of war bear upon gentlemen of the Confederate service. You will need money, perhaps, to make your journey. How much shall I lend you?"

With some difficulty the Confederate was made to accept fifty dollars, acknowledging the favor in phrases intended to conceal how pressing was his need, but in tones that quite sufficiently revealed it.

At the further gate of the garden they were met by those whom they sought. Bella ran up to her brother with almost a smile and many kisses, and then entwining both

her arms round one of his, asked, "And when shall we go back to dear old Multi-flora? To-day? Right now, shall we not? Oh yes, yes; this minute, this very minute!"

"Not immediately, my dear," was the reply. "It is important for us all I should make a long journey first; and should I happen to fail in the business I go upon, it may be necessary for you to remain some little time longer with your excellent friends, to whom you already owe more than your utmost gratitude can ever repay. Mrs. and Mr. Damarin have most kindly invited me to leave you with them, and I have consented."

Bella, who had hardly waited for him to be done, here burst forth:

"Leave me here—in yon stone prison-house, where I have borne a bitter captivity of nearly three years' duration—where I have been able to endure life only because of my daily hope that you would come, beneath the triumphant banners of the South, and reclaim me by force, as by force I was captured—where I never prayed for your coming without uttering a curse longer than my prayer against your enemies and mine! And now—now that you come to me—come to your sister, with every badge of a soldier stripped from your coat, I think the least you can do is to lead quickly away the poor emancipated captive, and not conspire with her enemies to prolong her imprisonment—"

"Bella! Bella!" interrupted her brother, astonished and alarmed. "Do you forget peace has been proclaimed?"

"Peace!" she replied. "There can never be peace between us and them, except the peace of death. If they will only exterminate us all, we will promise to be quiet. Will you—will the men of the South consent to remain under subjugation, not to the cowardly Yankees, but the more cowardly negroes, whom they have raised up to insult and degrade us more effectually than they could do it themselves? No! Southerners will not submit! They will take to the swamps and the mountains, with arms in their hands, and fight while they live! Charles, if ever again you would have me call you brother, rally to the fastnesses nature has made as refuges for desperate men,

and there raise anew the flag of the palmetto and rattlesnake, and this time let the ground they are painted on be black. Raise that flag, and I will go with you and carry it—I will, so help me God!"

Her brother, who seemed to have given up all thought of reasoning with the infuriate little wretch—who, by-the-way, looked furiously beautiful the while—let her run on at will; and the two soldiers listened and looked, the one with mingled admiration, amusement, and concern, the other with feelings of a sadder shade. When at length she paused from exhaustion, the brother quietly remarked, "Such talk as this, general, may be pleasant to indulge in as a parlor amusement. Southern women have been very fond of it, but Southern men—those who survive—have had enough of it. Bella!" he exclaimed, as she was beginning afresh, "be done! Not another word! I'm ashamed of you; you, a lady born, the daughter of a South Carolina gentleman—how dare you requite the hospitality of this family, which you have so long enjoyed, with such vile nonsense, such vulgar rant as this?" As he said this he approached his face to hers with a severe expression, and looked sternly in her eye, as if it were that of a wild beast he would quell with a glance.

Bella quailed. Perhaps the emotions of the day had exhausted her nervous power; or maybe the idea of her language, which to her seemed magnificent, being thought nonsensical and, what was worse, vulgar, struck her with such astonishment as to arrest the flow of her wormwood and gall; or else it was because she had at length met her match, and her brother's terrible eye had done its work. But she was cowed—stood silent; astonished and alarmed, perhaps, but certainly sulky, until, for the second time since morning, that sedative water of heaven called tears descended to bless her.

"Brother," said Polly, approaching the general, "don't mind the poor thing's raving. She's half crazed with her troubles; she don't mean a bit of what she says—she don't indeed. She gets over it right away, and when she isn't angry you don't know how good and sweet she is!"

The general smiled, and merely remarked, aside to his sister, "It's well the fi"

don't last long, or she would be apt to die of them."

But the present fit, in its sulky stage at least, was not so quickly got over. It lasted a week or more. And though she now permitted her apologist to lead her into the house, yet no sooner had they entered it than she broke away, flew up to the chamber occupied by them both, and turned the key of the door against the swiftly pursuing Polly, as she did that of her heart against all entreaties for admission. And there she remained all day, except when, at the rather peremptory summons of Mrs. Damarin, she appeared for a minute to bid her brother a gloomy farewell as he was about to go on board the Cincinnati packet, which stopped

at the landing on its way down the river about the middle of the afternoon.

At the twelve o'clock dinner Captain Johnston was not a little surprised, considering the evidence of competence, if not wealth, he witnessed, to see the farm people make their appearance. The general, too, was surprised to find how much the same circumstance annoyed himself. But Robert Hagan was more affected than either when a timid glance up the table informed him Bella's seat was vacant. He never dared look that way more than once during a meal, but the knowledge that she was there was something to him—how much he could not reckon or imagine; but it was something.

CHAPTER VIII.

"In cowards skulking to the hindmost rear,
Undying hate succeeds their panic fear."

THE further northward the ex-Confederate traveled, the less respect was accorded him. Throughout the South, in Kentucky, and even in the lower portions of the Northern Border States, it is possible for one with clean person, good morals, and inoffensive deportment to go in threadbare jeans and battered hat and boots, and yet receive such tolerable degree of deference as will permit him to retain his own self-respect. But when such a one journeys into the more civilized regions of further North, and looks for even the least consideration at the hands of the bureaucracy of boats, trains, and hotels, he will find that not the front of Jove, nor the grace of D'Orsay, nor the air and port of a crown prince, can avail to save him from contempt. It wore terribly on the spirit of the young Carolinian, representing, as he did, a family sprung from baronial stock, and connected with the Alstons, Middletons, Haynes, and Hegers—accustomed to condemn and not be condemned—to find himself taken by the elbow and pushed about, addressed, and "snubbed," not by any means as if all men were equal, but as if, on the contrary, they were very unequal indeed, and he one of the most inconsiderable. He was *not philosophic enough* to find consolation

in the thought that a gentleman disguised by misfortune can be discerned at first sight only by such as are themselves gentlemen, or connoisseurs of gentlemen; and he was galled to the very tissue of his nerves, and arrived at Chicago fuming with more hostility toward his late enemies than he had felt even in the heat of warfare, and was half sorry it was impracticable to follow Bella's advice, and find refuge in Pedee swamps or Appalachian gorges from a vulgarity so brutal. Thus, when he set out next morning in pursuit of his father's correspondent, his condition was far from what should be that of one who goes about a difficult search. He was discouraged in advance.

From the City Directory he made a list of the addresses of persons of the name of Richardson, which, judging from the occupations affixed, might include the address of the Mr. Richardson he wanted to find; then set out to call upon them in turn. The first on the list was a pork merchant, a pleasant enough person, who received him kindly, being used to deal with hog-drovers, but who soon satisfied him he could not be the object of his search. The next visit was to an old grizzly lawyer, lately come to Chicago, who in reply to one question popped off a dozen, which

d the case to the bottom, and then in words showed clearly that he could the man. The next was a railroad y, who left his desk and approached son who, from the outside of the office requested the favor of a few words "Well, what's wanted?" and on the s being opened to him, returned again desk, saying, as he went, "I know ; of any such person; you will have further." Another Richardson was ly too young; while another still, as absent from the city, was a Scotch- ad very old, and therefore could not person wanted. And so the last name list was reached, which was also that Richardson whom some of the others t might be the depository of the funds. s a banker, which circumstance, and his initials sounding rather familiar- Johnston's ear, led him to entertain ing like a hope. But each of the times he called at the office of the the latter was either absent or too e be seen, and a fourth attempt had eferred till evening, and made at his ce.

arly as seven o'clock Johnston was the bell at the door of an elegant n, such as bankers are able to dwell es, Mr. Richardson was at home, and rky would learn if he could be seen, isitor would wait in the hall. Pres- man, sixty years old, of heavy as- ith white hair but black eyebrows, ut of the parlor, and on hearing the f Captain Johnston, of the late Con- e army, seemed rather surprised, not displeased, and conducted him magnificent parlor, where he asked be seated. "Well," remarked the , as they sat down, at the same time ng the visitor from head to foot, and ; strangely, "I suppose you are pretty ally used up down South about these

ry much so," replied Johnston, whom ing in the other's manner repelled, de him resolve to go cautiously about uiries. "May I ask, Sir, if you ever onded with my father, Mr. James on, of Georgetown District, South a?"



"Johnston? Johnston?" repeated the bank- er. "When I was in the pork-packing busi- ness I used to deal with planters in all parts of the South, and I think I do remember making shipments to one of that name in South Carolina; but"—looking keenly at his questioner—"why do you want to know?"

"Another question, Sir, if you please: did you ever meet my father in person?"

"Very likely I have; but why do you ask?"

"Please permit me one single inquiry fur- ther: did he call upon you when he came to the North in 1863?"

"I don't think, my friend, you will make much further progress with me until I know your reasons for putting these questions."

This extreme caution made the young man feel sure he had found at last the depository of the rice money, while at the same time that depository, from some motives, good or bad, would be very slow to admit himself such.

"I had supposed, Sir," said Johnston, so much agitated as he felt himself nearing the hidden treasure he could hardly command his utterance, "that as the war was closed there would no longer be any occasion for further secrecy concerning the transactions between you and my father; but, in order that you may be frank with me, I will men- tion that my father is no longer living, and

that I, as his representative, am come to ask you, if perfectly convenient, to give me a statement of the account he kept with you. I allude more particularly to the moneys he placed in your hands when he visited you in 1863."

"Hum!" grimly interjected the banker, his covetous under-lip pushing up and overlapping the upper one. "What did you say the amount was?"

"That, Sir," returned Johnston, feeling the importance of concealing that he had no proofs of the deposit, "depends on the price of gold at the time. I have not the memorandum in my pocket at this moment, but think the cargo must have sold for as much as thirty thousand dollars in specie; must it not?"

"Thirty thousand in specie," was repeated in the same tone; and a suspicious nose moved downward to meet the covetous lip. "And if your father had placed that sum with me, do you know what I would have done with it?" Here the eyes snapped out sparks of fire. "I would have had it confiscated before the sun went down! Thirty thousand dollars is less than a third of what your Southern gentlemen swindled me out of before they rebelled. They were brave enough to steal long before they found the courage to fight, and months before they dared fire a shot they repudiated their honest debts. The swindling, scoundrelly traitors! And now you have done your worst, and been whipped, cowed, and beggared, you have the impudence to come and demand payment of debts which you pretend Northern men owe you! Yes, with your hands hardly washed clean of the blood of loyal men, and the butternut rags still hanging about you, you are traveling through the loyal States on a collecting tour. If I had my way, every mother's son of you should hang for a traitor, and every acre of your land, and every horse, mule, cow, hog, sheep, and chicken that runs over it should be given to your slaves."

"So you deny the debt, then?" interrupted his hearer, white as a sheet.

"Deny the debt! Ha! ha! It so happens there's no debt to deny in the present case. *No, no; if any bloody traitor ever brought money to Chicago, he gave it to some Copper-*

heads to keep, and not to John Richardson, the rebel-hater."

The rebel-hater's visitor knocked him down, and rushed from the house.

"When does the first train leave for the South?" inquired Johnston of the clerk at the Sherman House.

"It is too late for the Cairo train, but one leaves for Cincinnati in twenty minutes. The omnibus is at the door now."

"Have my baggage brought down, if you please."

And he was soon speeding southward over the moon-lit prairie. Of course all idea of further continuing the search was abandoned — abandoned in disgust and self-contempt that he could ever have been fool enough to look for honesty, or honor, or generosity to a fallen foe from a race he had always known to be vile, though he had never personally known them at all.

He reached the steamboat landing at Cincinnati next day too late for any of the up-river packets except one bound for Wheeling, on which he embarked, being assured by the clerk he would be put off at Damarin's Landing about nine o'clock the same evening. His head was busy with forming plans for the future, but as yet he had decided on none of these, and his mind was in a condition to be drifted away easily by any side current that might come.

Soon after the cabin lamps were lit, a passenger approached him with a proposition to make up a game of euchre. "Only for amusement," said the man; "I never play in any other way." Johnston accepted, though quite aware that two or more of the players would be professed gamblers; for he had acquired remarkable skill at cards, and was not so wholly innocent of the various tricks of the profession but that he could meet and foil them. He won—won repeatedly, and pocketed considerable sums. The excitement about the table was high, for the company appreciated and enjoyed the state of things. Thus, when the bell rung for Damarin's Landing, and the clerk informed Johnston of it, he was not disposed to quit his winning game, and declined to go on shore. Late in the night he rose from the cards several hundred dollars richer than when he sat down.

In the morning his enticer approached him with a proposition to be his confederate in a gambling expedition to the oil regions of West Virginia, where vast sums were being lost and won by the in-gathering adventurers from all quarters of the land. The captain's skill at cards was such, he said, that if it were associated with some of his own professional experience and knowledge of

men, there would be no doubt of their making "a big thing," as he expressed it. Johnston did not consent to the disgraceful proposal, but he did not absolutely refuse, and when the two left the boat at Parkersburg they stopped at the same hotel for the night, and the next day were seen traveling together in the direction of the new oil wells.

CHAPTER IX.

"Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!"

It was about a fortnight after the departure of Captain Johnston from Stone House that Robert Hagan received orders that he should, early in the morning, take a skiff-load of wheat down to the mill at Concord, and get it ground. Pleased with the expedition, he was up betimes, and, after loading the little boat with as many well-filled sacks as it could carry and keep dry, he pushed off and pulled for the middle of the stream, intending to take advantage of the current in its full strength, since the morning fog, which filled the valley from the surface of the water to the level of the banks, and from thence up to the tops of the hills, was so dense that no steamboat would dare be moving to run him down. Thus, though he could but dimly see the stern of his own skiff, he felt absolute safety on the bosom of the mighty river.

O man! O boy! how little can you know where beneath the skies is safety or danger for boy or man! Robert had already turned the bow of the little craft down stream, and was pulling cheerily away, mentally defying the biggest steamboat on the river to touch or hurt him, though one of them, from her mooring close by, just then began to blow off steam with a roar so loud and so long it almost stunned his five senses, when—what's that? who goes there? As he sits at his oars, looking toward the stern, there glides noiselessly across the wake a boat formed of mist and shadow, bolt upright in whose stern seat, with folded arms and scowling front, was the spectre of the man he had killed! The next instant a blow between the eyes knocked the beholder backward into the bottom of his skiff.

The only condition upon which the presence of ghosts is tolerable is that they do not strike. One sense may support the perception of them, two hardly; and if the victim in the present case had possessed imagination, he would scarcely have survived the double shock received. As it was, pure and unadulterate horror thrilled him to the tip end of every uplifting hair of his head, and long he lay without nerve or will. When he was strong enough to sit up and look and listen, the din of rushing steam had ceased, and nothing was to be seen, nor any sound heard, except dimly and doubtfully far away what might be the noise of oars. Then the poor boy, drifting at the will of the deep, impetuous flood, enveloped with the white darkness of the terrestrial cloud, got upon his knees and prayed—prayed till his white visage grew purple, and the cold sweat that was upon him became hot, while his unpiloted boat was borne miles beyond its destination. He prayed that the vision of his victim—often before seen in dreams, never till now with waking eyes—might fade out of sight and mind, might go to its rest, might be received into heaven, or cast down into hell, or in some other way disposed of effectually and finally. He prayed directly to the spirit of the dead man to forgive him for the act of war, or murder, or homicide, in the first, second, or third degree, whichever it might be, and urgently recommended him to submit quietly to death, since return to life must be impracticable; begged that his tender years at the time he did the deed might be taken into account, as well as his ignorance of reading and writ-

ing, and that the provocation might be charitably considered, as it was in the celebrated Sickles case. He prayed finally that the Great Judge would pardon his soul when he himself should die, and admit him into that heaven, at least, where the murderer went whom he saw die on the gallows after singing a cheerful hymn on the scaffold. He promised never again to shoot any human being so long as he should live, and, above all, never to make war again—neither “on his own hook” nor on government account—no, not to save the life of a dozen nations.

Very foolish stuff indeed; but how much foolish stuff is uttered in prayer by people not near so much in earnest as poor Robert was!

His uncouth religious exercise did him good, and, what was more, his uncouth petition was granted; for the spectre never appeared unto him any more from that day forward, neither to his sleeping nor waking senses.

Having come out of his agony, he resumed the oars, which, being adjusted with swivels, had not gone adrift, and without knowing that it was one of them had “caught the crab” and struck the blow attributed to the ghost, rowed toward shore till the dead-water was reached, and then finding himself three miles below Concord, made every exertion to recover lost ground and time. But, do his best, he was unable to get back with his flour to Stone House until the close of the day. In the evening the gossip among the loungers under the apple-trees informed Robert that General Damarin had that day gone back to his command, to remain until he should be mustered out, and also that another brother of “the gal rebel,” as Bella was unpopularly called, had been to see her. He was described as being taller than the other and much better dressed. The rumor also ran that he had brought bad news, whose tenor being unknown its quality had been guessed at by those who saw the serious faces worn by the major and Mr. Damarin during the long walk they took back and forth in the avenue, and observed the absence of Bella from the supper-table.

The true story was that Major Johnston had come as well for the purpose of seeing a *sister from whom he had so long been separated, as to explain to her and her protectors*

why she could not yet be removed to her own home. He brought a letter from his brother Charles, communicating his ill success at Chicago, and apologizing for not calling at Stone House while on his way up the river. It seems the two brothers had met with some pecuniary success in the oil regions, and were then engaged in an enterprise from which brilliant results would come if it turned out well. The major gave his sister a one hundred dollar bill, and left twice as large a sum with Mr. Damarin to be given her as it should be needed; any indemnity for what he had already expended on her account being peremptorily declined by the large-hearted farmer, though he who offered it consoled his pride by resolving to renew the offer in more pressing form whenever he should be better supplied with the means of carrying it out. He remained nearly the whole day at Stone House, and, like his brother Charles, made friends of all its inmates, the general included, before he left.

The family supposed very naturally that the enterprise alluded to was digging a well for oil, or speculating in “oil lands;” but they were mistaken. It was something a good deal safer; it consisted in conducting a faro bank, and doing a general gambling business. Hardly an easier and surer road to wealth, if not respectability, exists than professional gambling well followed; that is to say, followed with cool head, steady nerve, and a close adherence to the principles which should govern it. But it seldom is well followed, and where attempted by young gentlemen like the Johnstons, who feel it to be a degradation, is almost sure to be pushed to hazardous extremes, and become associated with other vices incompatible with cool head and steady nerve, and especially incompatible with a thrifty care and disposition of the profits.

And thus, of course, it fell out with the two young Carolinians. For the first six months their success was most brilliant; for the six which followed, their course was down hill and among the rocks. The worthy object of saving a parental estate from decay, and reclaiming a sister from exile and dependence, which in the beginning they held up to themselves as a justification for using

unworthy means, was lost sight of equally in the excitement of success and the despondency of failure. And before the end of a year they had gone many a mile on the road to ruin—and to crime. Now let the curtain drop, hardly again to be lifted, lest the reader, by following their career in its details of adventure, have his interest painfully abstracted from the true thread of this story, which he may hope will be spun of a brighter floss.

Wherefore, when another four seasons had come and gone, and the redbud and dogwood blossoms had again appeared and vanished on the Kentucky hills that frowned or smiled, according as their humor was, upon the Stone House and its people, Bella Johnston still found herself a prisoner there, with the day of her redemption more than ever uncertain.

On the second day following the visit of Major Johnston and the general's departure Mrs. Damarin, with the two girls, went on the boat to Portsmouth. And why did they go? Because Bella, despite her despondency, and through all her hatred and disgust toward her surroundings, both animate and inanimate, felt her pocket to be in peril of flames and combustion from the presence there of the one hundred dollar bill. Mrs. Damarin, who was invited to act as counselor, found it hard to keep the girl from buying every pretty thing she saw, in the order in which they met her eye, and quite impossible to restrain her from making all her purchases in double, so that Polly could have the same as herself; for Bella was as generous as she was inconsiderate. The bundles with which the tired shoppers returned home in the evening contained two

black silk dress patterns, and numerous articles of flummery of the flimsier sort. But flummery and flimsiness had their use, and in the occupation of making up the materials purchased, with its difficulties, dilemmas, and deliberations, Bella found a solace, one of the best possible to a woman in grief. And here let it be said that whoever would defend the apparently barbarous custom of hanging our bodies in black when our souls are afflicted might best do so by taking the ground that it compels a widow, that chief mourner of all, to occupy herself in the dreary blank that comes in between death-bed and grave with selecting and arranging crape and bombazine, muslin and cambric, jet jewelry and japanned pins, handkerchiefs and gloves, collars and caps, frilling and quilling, piping and fluting—an occupation so distracting that it amounts to a sort of diversion, and becomes, in spite of her, pleasanter than she knows.

Thus Bella, who was not a widow, but a young maiden with a rich nature, responsive to all that gave interest or enjoyment, before the end of the fortnight required to make and fit the dresses and accessories, had become almost cheerful, and when her dress was finally tried on, seemed as happy as Polly; and though when taking it off she heaved a deep sigh, was careful not to do so until all the hooks and eyes had been unfastened.

After this the girls resumed their daily visits to the house of their instructor; and Robert was again happy in his daily duty of starting them off and receiving them on their return. Polly was happy that she was not yet bereft of her friend; and the friend, say what she might to the contrary, was at least comfortable.





CHAPTER X.

"Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay."

THREE months after he returned to duty General Damarin was mustered out of service, and came home again. Something had meanwhile happened to the young man that greatly altered him. A residence of three months with the family of a rich creole planter, whose elegant mansion he had during the owner's absence protected by making it his head-quarters, and in which afterward, on pressing invitation, he remained as a guest, had quite turned Damarin's head. He had seen pictures and statuary, and read guide-books, and listened to the conversation of his entertainers, who had spent a third of their lives in Europe, till he got fascinated with the Old World, and resolved on spending two years of his time and all of the savings from his pay in seeing, studying, and enjoying it.

Besides the desire to travel, the planter had inspired his guest with sentiments and purposes such as might worthily guide a young American favored by fortune with means and opportunity for making the precious but perilous exploration this one was about to undertake.

It was not until he had enjoyed a happy month of idleness with his family that he ventured to make known his intention of leaving them. The farmer, looking toward the future, had already begun to puzzle himself with the question what to do with a brevet general on a farm, for he could hardly expect him to fling off the uniform and take to the plow and reaper as of old; but the proposed solution of the problem was one that astonished him. "Travel!" he exclaimed; "travel for two years! Why, isn't that what you've been doing these last four years? Where on earth do you want to travel now? Isn't your own country good enough for you?"

"No, it isn't," broke in the weeping mother; "his own country ain't good enough for him, nor his own home, nor his own folks neither. I see how it is. Those great folks he's been with have done all this. They've spoiled my boy. He isn't my own Willy any more." Repeating herself in this last remark, and employing her old formula of reproof that used to be all-powerful to subdue the willfulness of the Willy of six years old.

And Willy had trouble enough to satisfy them he was, and would ever be, the same loving son he had been, and reconcile them to his executing what he failed to persuade them was any thing but a boyish whim.

During the two months he remained at Stone House, before departing on his travels, the young general and his young prisoner were of necessity thrown much in the way of each other. And as each of them expected this to be their last intercourse, it was more free and more truthful than otherwise it might have been. He, on his part, found the study of her real character and disposition as interesting as her strange, intractable conduct had formerly been amusing—found in it much that needed to be excused, but more to admire. But what required no study to unveil it, what rendered investigation into mental and moral qualifications, and all those matters so important in the case of an ugly woman, of but small consequence to a man vulnerable through the eyes, as most men are, was Bella's rich Grecian type of beauty; not as yet developed in its fullness, to be sure, but every now and then announcing with a flash of expression that it was coming—rising like water in the fountain, swelling like the bud in its calyx, kindling and coloring like the sky before sunrise.

And Bella, on her part, patterning her de-

portment after that of her brothers, as she felt bound to do, treated him with respect and outward amiability, though without abating any of her hatred, which she privately indulged in more than ever, now he was near enough to be hated intimately; for we know the true enjoyment of hatred, as well as of love, requires proximity of the object; and her enemy, having come within easy hating range, got thoroughly detested daily by the gentle companion of Polly and himself in their frequent rides along the ridge roads of the neighboring hills. And

even while alone she would call up his image repeatedly to her mind's eye, to be hated again and again. After he had gone, too, she would call up the same image, though not to hate it; for what would be the use of hating one she could never see again?

"I do declare, Polly," said Bella, the day after the general's departure, "if my new black silk isn't half wore out already, while yours is as good as new!"

"No wonder," replied Polly, "for you've worn yours every day of the last fortnight."

"Have I?" said Bella.

CHAPTER XI.

"We burn no grimy coal or coke,
With sulphur smell or smoke bituminous,
But hickory and chestnut-oak
Consume to comfort and illumine us."

LONG as a tree should stand on the five hundred acres of hill land owned by the old-fashioned farmer of Stone House, he had sworn nothing but wood should burn on the broad hearth of its great square sitting-parlor. Before that hearth, on an evening that closed one of the closing days of the year 1866, he and his family were seated comfortably and cheerfully. The fine, low singing of the foamy butt of the back-log was the only voice heard in the apartment. It was nearly bed-time. The newspaper had been read and the needle-work laid by, and each one of the half circle was looking at the fire and only thinking, as it is easy to do in the presence of a fire of wood, a fountain of water, or the dashing of sea waves on the beach.

Mr. Damarin was thinking of the work he had planned for the morning; his wife was thinking of her Willy; Polly was thinking, if all their thoughts *must* be told, that Robert Hagan in his "store clothes" was the handsomest young man—except her just-named brother—she had ever seen; Bella was wondering why her brothers had not come for her, and whether, after all, General Damarin would not return first: for Bella Johnston was still there, and her brothers had not yet come. "Somebody's hailing," exclaimed Mr. Damarin, rising up and going to the window fronting toward the river.

The hail was the usual call for the ferryman, a long, musical whoop; but to the practiced ear of the listener this one expressed unusual urgency.

"You won't send any body out such a night as this," remonstrated his wife, "and the river running ice!"

"I won't send any body—no," he replied; "but there's somebody over there who wants badly to get across, and if one of the men chooses to go and earn the ferriage for his own pocket, I'm willing he should take the skiff; I wouldn't, of course, trust the boat," alluding to the small scow or flat used for ferrying horses and cattle. He went out with this purpose, and the result was that Robert Hagan volunteered to go. He encountered little floating ice, which was mostly near the shore, and by keeping the skiff heading up stream, crossed squarely over. But soon as he came within speaking distance of the other side, a voice called out of the darkness:

"Go back and bring your flat. We've three horses to cross. Go quick; the quicker you go, the better we'll pay."

"Pay or no pay, I can't fetch the flat to-night. He told me I mustn't."

"No matter what he told you. I tell you to go back and fetch it, and you shall have two dollars."

"I shan't do it, I tell you. Come along, if you want to leave your horses behind to

daylight. If you don't, I'll go back again," was the firm reply.

There was some further useless expostulation, in which two of the three horsemen, who could be dimly discerned on the shore, took part, followed by a low conference among themselves, which Robert, however, cut short by crying, "If you ain't going, I am."

"Stop!" exclaimed one of the horsemen, as he dismounted. Then, walking to the skiff, he stepped in, took his seat, saying, "Pull away." He said nothing more until the other side was nearly reached, when he broke silence with the abrupt question:

"Mr. Damarin has a large family, hasn't he?"

"Oh yes, there's a good many of us."

"A large family of children living with him, I mean?"

"No, he hasn't—only Polly."

"Only Polly? I thought he had two daughters," rejoined the stranger, rather carelessly, and after a pause.

"The other one isn't his daughter," replied Robert, briefly as he could frame his sentence.

"Are Mr. and Mrs. Damarin well?—in good health?"

"Yes."

"And the two young ladies, Miss Polly and—Miss Bella, I think you said, are they both of them well also?"

"I didn't say her name was Bella."

"Oh, didn't you?" said the questioner, affably. "May I ask what is her name?"

"Her name's Bella, but I didn't tell you so."

"But she's well, you say?"

"Yes."

The landing was now reached. The stranger, stepping on shore, handed a bit of fractional money to the ferryman, and merely remarking, "This is the way out to the road, I think," was soon lost to sight. Robert pulled the skiff well up out of water, and returned toward the house by the orchard path. But as he went through the gate into the garden he observed to himself: "That flat ought to be beached in the morning too. The river's falling so fast she'll beach herself before then, if Boldman didn't spar her off good. Look here!" (still to himself, in *continuation*), "why didn't I see to her while

I was about it?" And suddenly stopping, he turned and ran down to the shore. The flat was not there! Yes, it was, but not six paces out, and being slowly pushed away by a figure standing in the stern, which, if darkness did not deceive him, Robert recognized as that of the very man he had just ferried over. To board the flat seemed impossible at the moment; but while the youth halted at the water's edge and shouted, there came drifting down between where he stood and the receding boat a large cake of ice, which so far bridged the space that, with a short run and flying leap, he was aboard—yes, and lying flat on his face too; but whether from tripping on a cross-timber, or from a blow, he could never afterward remember. A strong grasp, inclusive of all his collars from overcoat to shirt, held him down, and a voice, in which he recognized the very tones of his late passenger, while at the same time he heard the click of a revolver horribly close to his ear, said, "Be quiet, my man, and don't make a fool of yourself."

"Oh yes, I will," was his rather nervous reply.

"Don't be frightened," continued the stranger. "I intended to row the boat myself, but I dare say you can do it a good deal better; so you take the oars, while I hold the revolver. We'll keep to our first offer, you see. You shall have your two dollars. We will get put across. There'll be nobody to blame, nor any body hurt. Otherwise you'll die to-night," he concluded, with the impressive coolness of a veteran.

Robert was brave enough, but it seemed so reasonable he should obey revolver law, in the absence of any other, he submitted, and pulled manfully at his oars as any galley prisoner of old. Notwithstanding which, however, the impatience of the stranger was evident. "Pull hard as you can," he would exclaim, "till we get to the other side. You'll have help coming back, and there'll be no hurry then."

They had got half-way over when a faint gleam of light shot across the waves. A loud oath burst from the impatient stranger. "A fire!" he exclaimed; "the infernal old fool!" adding, a minute later, and addressing Robert, "You see that fire? pull straight for it!" Robert, looking, saw a small heap of brush

burning near the foot of the precipitous bluff of the river's bank, whose irregular face it revealed in bright lights and black shadows. It was a little above (that is, up the river from) the ferry landing. As the boat, in making a direct crossing, must be kept with its bow inclined up stream, it was easy for the oarsman, by looking over his left shoulder as he worked, to keep the point of destination in view. Approaching nearer to where the fire was burning, two persons could be seen beside it; one of them standing, and apparently warming his feet, while leaning on the neck of his horse; the other crouched closely down to the blaze, as if he would get into it. Behind this one two other horses stood, as if held by him. As a brighter blaze than usual shot up, the stranger started to his feet, then sat down again, crying, "Pull! pull! pull! I tell you!" Robert, looking at the same instant, had seen, as the other had, the forms of several men moving on the edge of the bluff. The next moment voices were heard on the bank, one of them much louder than the others. Then shots were fired, some from the party on the bank, now in darkness, and two or three from the upright figure on the shore, who fired from behind the breastwork the body of his horse afforded. Meanwhile the one who had crouched over the blaze sprang upon one of the animals he was holding, and went galloping down the shore. Then came quite a volley from the bank, and the horse that had served for a breastwork broke away as if wounded, while his master sprang into the shelter of the bluff. "Pull away! pull faster! pull right in, or I'll shoot!" cried the stranger, as Robert slackened his oars, but a few rods from shore.

"I don't know about pulling in," remarked Robert, though at the same time obeying the command; "it sounds like there was more pistols there than here." He took care to make his landing some hundred paces above the scene of the contest. The other leaped to land, pistol in hand, and at once took to the shelter of the bluff, but at a place where it was a good deal darker, because remoter from the fire, than where the other shore combatant was. As he did so, he called loudly to his comrade, "Get this way as far as you can, Ned." From this the fight was kept up with coolness and caution

on both sides, the bluff serving as shelter to both, very much as when two contending forces fire at each other from opposite sides of the same earth-work, though the advantage of position was greatly with the party on the bank, who were sheltered by it from the light. Those on the shore, as if aware of this, kept moving cautiously up river at every opportunity, but gradually drawing near each other.

Robert, as soon as he was relieved from duress, pulled off into the current, his first impulse being to get out of pistol range; but the next minute curiosity prevailed, and he only used the oars to hold a position far enough off to make sure of not being boarded, and from there watched the fight. Soon after the reinforcement arrived, as has been just mentioned, and during a lull in the apparently ineffectual firing, a loud but calm voice from the bank said,

"Major Johnston, I really think you'd better give yourself up, and go back with us. The doctor told me yesterday he thought the wounded gentleman would get well. I tell you the truth, upon my honor."

The only reply to this was another shot, but the effect was to add another recruit to the weaker party.

"Johnston!—Major!—Ned! That's Edward," exclaimed Robert to himself. "Why, they're Bella's brothers!" And from that minute his only thought was how to assist them. The fight had drifted half a pistol range further toward where he was, and further away from the fire, which still, however, shed a dangerous though fitful light. By one of its flashes, Edward Johnston, who had emptied his revolvers, could be seen attempting to climb up the face of the bank—a most difficult feat—as if to close in with his enemies. Evidently the case was critical with the brothers, and he who would aid them must move quickly. Robert did so; rapidly as possible he reversed his strokes, and rowed down stream till he got past the fire. Then, running in and landing his boat, he lifted from the water a cake of ice large as he could carry, and with it approached the fire. As he did so the sounds of two shots in quick succession from the top of the bank caused him to look that way. He saw Edward reel backward toward the

edge, with both arms flung upward, while from one hand there dropped a flashing blade, and then fall heavily over the bluff to the feet of his brother below. The next instant the broad mass of ice was flung upon the fire, extinguishing it completely. And then all was as still as it was dark.

Noiselessly as he could, Robert drew near to where Edward had fallen, and found Charles holding his brother in his arms, whose last breath came from him in a long, faint groan, which was replied to by one of bitterness and agony from the living. "A friend! Captain, I'm your friend," whispered Robert. "Come to the boat quick!" and grasping Charles by the arm, he led—almost dragged—him down to the boat, pushed him in, followed quickly himself, snatched the oars, and pulled out of pistol reach before those on the bank could grope their way down to the water. Unheeding the few shots they fired at random, Charles Johnston remained for some minutes in convulsive emotion; but presently, rising to his feet, he commanded Robert to hold the boat where she was, as he had something to say. Then, in a perfectly calm and distinct voice, he called across the water,

"Sheriff Brown! it is you, I believe, who shot my brother?"

A voice as calm, and almost bland in its tone, replied: "I am very sorry, Captain Johnston, for this unpleasant occurrence; but you and every other gentleman must know an officer is bound to make his arrests without fear or favor of any gentleman; and if gentlemen will resist, I can not be responsible for the consequences."

"I think I must hold you responsible, however," rejoined Johnston. "With your own life, sheriff, you shall answer for this, so help me God! I was about to quit your State for good; but now I shall return to it, and never leave it while you live there. Wherever you go, I shall be on your track. You have killed my only brother, and I'll have your life, or—"

"—Or else I must take yours: excuse the interruption," said the sheriff, still calm and bland. "Very well, captain; and since you are so frank, allow me to give you notice, in return, that if you and I should ever have the *pleasure of meeting again*, you must expect

me to defend myself *Kaintuck* fashion, the same as any other gentleman would, without fear or favor, you know."

Johnston made no reply, but turning to Robert, who, as requested, was rowing just sufficiently to stem the current, said, in a low voice, "If you would still further befriend me, let your boat drop quietly down stream, keeping her a little closer to the shore." Then, seeing Robert readily comply, he said, "You have saved my life, and at the risk of your own. Do you know me?"

"All I know is you're the brother of Bella, and I reckon I'd risk my life a good many times for her or any of her kin."

"You would! Why would you?"

"Because I love her!" he exclaimed, the hard crust of long self-retention breaking with an explosion at last under pressure of the peculiar circumstances. "I just do. I never let on about it to her or any body; but I love her right straight along, and always shall."

"And who are you?" abruptly demanded Johnston.

"My name is Robert Hagan, and I work for Mr. Damarin."

"Hush! or you'll be heard. Keep still, and work a little more inshore, if you please."

By a gentle dip of an oar from time to time the flat was kept within dim sight of the water's edge, or if sometimes receding from all view of it, the low grating against the land of the drifting ice—the only sound to be heard—enabled them to guess their distance. And so, drifting with the ice, which now ran closer and in larger floats than at first it had, they moved noiselessly along till quite beyond hearing distance of the place of the late conflict. Then Johnston began to whistle at intervals a few notes of a tune. After several repetitions the whistle was answered by another, but with a different tune.

"There he is; row in, if you can."

With difficulty Robert pushed in and made a landing. On the shore a figure was seen approaching them cautiously, and leading two horses. "Hector," said Johnston.

"Mass Charles, dat you? an' you's got Mass Ned too?" came in a shuddering voice from an old man with face dark as the night itself.

"No, you cowardly old scoundrel!" cried Johnston, furiously: "they've shot him by the light of that infernal fire you kindled." Then, in a milder voice, he added, "Your master Edward's dead, Hector."

The old negro fell into an agony of grief; but Johnston checked any prolonged expression of it with—

"Stop your howling, or you'll bring them here to shoot me too. Keep quiet and listen, for the time for talking is short. You will find your master Edward not very far from where you built your cursed fire—"

"Oh, my God, *mossa*, it was so cold! I was freezin' to def."

"Hold your tongue, you shivering old coward! You must take charge of him, as you did of your old master, and not leave him until he's decently buried. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, *mossa*, I *yeddy*."*

"I shall leave the sorrel horse with you. Sell him for what you can get, to pay the expense of the funeral—do you understand me? Listen sharp; there's not much time."

"Oh yes, *mossa*, I understands."

"And after it's all over, and not before—mind, not before—cross the ferry to a stone house on the other side—a stone house, remember—where Mr. Damarin lives. Mr. Damarin, do you mind the name?"

"Damarin—Damarin—yes, *mossa*, me got him."

"You'll find Miss Bella there."

"Miss Bella!—de darlin' ob de Lord! What, little Miss Bella!—de Lord be praised!"

"Listen! You'll find her there. Tell her of Master Ned's death." Here he drew Hector to one side, and added, in a tone too low for Robert, who remained by the boat, to hear: "Be careful what else you tell her; but say to her this: that she will hear from me again before long, I hope; but whatever happens, she must remember who she is; and, Hector—come a little further this way—we can't tell what may happen, you know; but if—don't let her marry any one beneath her. If you see any danger of it, say what you please from me. Do you understand? If you don't, say so."

* Hear.

"*Mossa*, I understands perfectly. - Nebber fear. Hector 'll nebber permit noddin o' de kind."

"And you must remain with Miss Bella long as you live. Promise me, Hector, that you will."

"Yes, yes, Mass Charley, I promises; but *hoonah*,* *way day'st* *hoonah* gwine! Oh, Mass Charley, less all go back to de ole place right 'way."

"Hector, none of us may ever see the old place any more, nor may you and I ever see one another again," returned Johnston, sadly. "Give me your hand, old man, and forgive me as if you were parting from me forever. You have always been faithful to us, Hector. When father was killed, we left him in your hands; now Edward is killed, another of our dead remains with you, and the only one of the living worth caring for I leave in your care. You may soon find yourself her only protector. As for me, no one can know what my fate will be; but if a single hope is left me in my desperation, it is that my eyes, too, may be closed by this same faithful hand. Where's my horse?"

Taking the bridle that was handed him, Johnston returned to where he left Robert standing, shook hands with and thanked him anew, and with much feeling. Then turning again toward the old negro, he went and embraced him as he might have embraced a father or a brother; after which he leaped into the saddle, and rode into darkness.

It required all the strength of the two that remained to row the flat against the ice-burdened current back to the ferry landing, which they were not able to reach until late in the night. On the way the old man, garrulous in his grief, unfolded to his companion a large portion of the family history, relating, among other things, the circumstances of his old master's death; how himself and Charles had carried the dying man into a house at the road-side, where he soon breathed his last in their arms, while Edward had gone in pursuit of the bush-whacker who fired the shot, and whom, when caught, he had put to death with his

* You.

† Which way is.



"ROBERT STRUCK A LIGHT, AND REMOVED THE COVERING FROM THE FACE."

own hand; and how, a moment after, the avenger, in his turn, had fallen, seriously wounded, by the bullet of a concealed marksman. "But he killed de ablishun Yankee, dough; and dat was some satisfaction," added the impenitent old rebel.

When they found the body, it was not at the landing, but in a house near by, into which the sheriff's posse had conveyed it. Robert followed Hector into the apartment where it lay, and with an agitated hand struck a light, and removed the covering from the face—and his heart was at rest; for it was the face of the very man whom he had shot more than three years before,

and whom, during all that time, he believed he had killed.

The ice drifted heavy and fast, as Robert Hagan pulled at the two clumsy oars, through the long mid-hour of that night of conflict and death, and the current ran turbulent and strong; but the oars felt like mere sculls in his grasp, and he made the large boat quiver as a skiff beneath his feet; for a mark very much like that of Cain was effaced from his front, and his spirit was as light as the snow-flakes that were beginning to fall, changing the black night into a white one, and making his course plain and easy to find and to follow.



CHAPTER XII.

“‘Labor is worship,’ is a pleasant saying,
But those who say so never do their praying
With pick or shovel, hammer, tongs, or anvil,
If they can help it.”

THOSE only who know how exaggerated is the family pride of an old family servant, especially of a black one and a slave, can imagine the feelings of Hector—who, at Charles Johnston's command, and obedient to his own sense of duty, had found means to domesticate himself at Stone House, in order to play sage Mentor to Miss Bella, and keep her from doing aught beneath the dignity of the Johnstons—when he discovered she had already entered on a course of low conduct. She did not keep bad company, nor lie, nor cheat, nor steal; but she worked! Yes, Bella labored with those beautiful hands of hers; debased those ten taper fingers—which no lady should ever use save in playing on the piano, or scratching her enemies' cheeks—to the base utilities of domestic life. She swept rooms, made up beds, dusted furniture, made butter and cheese, cooked food and served it, washed clothes and ironed them; and, having continued in her ways of evil for more than twelve months, she had become so hardened in them that not all the mortified Hector could say, not all his commands, entreaties, and tears, were of the least avail to reclaim her from them.

Mrs. Damarin and Polly worked also, but Bella was foremost in efficiency, as she had been foremost in conceiving the enterprise of performing all the ministrations of the temple of home without the help of hireling hands. And thus it fell out: About the time when Bella's growing intelligence began to recognize her relation of dependence to the Damarins, and her pride, enlightened by that intelligence, to rise from the sphere in which idleness appeared as worthiness into that in which to eat the bread of idleness seemed

unworthy and shameful, and about the time also when the uncertainties of her situation so preyed on her mind as to prevent profitable study or reading, there occurred in the household one of those *émeutes* that are so common in America.

At the period in question the government of the family was administered by two women, who, like the Roman consuls of old, ruled with a dual sway and remorseless rigor. One of them was of Connaught, and one of Congo. Always tyrannical and overbearing, they had of late years become doubly so, the one in consequence of military operations in the South, and the other in consequence of military operations, on a smaller scale, in the North. Though often quarreling with one another, as Roman consuls used to do, they perfectly agreed in keeping the yoke on the necks of their unhappy subjects.

Like other tyrants, these pretended that those they governed were unfit to govern themselves, and took good care they never should learn to be fit. To this end, they performed their administrative duties in such rude, coarse, and slovenly ways that gentler natures shrunk from attempting them, resisted the introduction of inventions designed to supplant clumsy brute force with skillful handling and intelligent management, and by various means surrounded their occupations, especially those of the kitchen, with an atmosphere of mystery and disgust.

It has been cited in proof of the poverty of the Spanish intellect during a certain long period of time, that the kings of Spain were obliged to procure all their ministers of state from Italy. But what deficiency in the Ame-

ican character has obliged our people to set up over their departments of domestic economy, neatness, and order ministers so wasteful, untidy, and disorderly as the two who ruled in the kitchen of Stone House? If the fault is with our women, then severely are they punished for it. If the suffering that comes from tyranny could be measured with a measure, or weighed in scales, it might be found that American women have endured more of grievance at the hands of these their oppressors by tenfold than they endured who wrung Magna Charta from King John, or they who cut off King Charles's head; and more by a hundredfold than is recorded in the Declaration of Independence as a *casus belli* in 1776—yes, by a thousandfold!

The tyranny in question darkens the household and hearth, brings disquiet to the pillow of the most hardy, and causes the tears of the weak to flow without stint. It leaves us helpless in sickness and trouble, and shows us a skeleton's head at every feast. Wealth can purchase no exemption, for wealth only multiplies the oppressors, and the uncertainties, apprehensions, alarms, destructions, devastations, insults, and calamities of every sort that attend this social curse. As the social is wider than the civil state, so is the scope of this tyranny wider than the scope of that other kind which heroes are born to resist. But the victims of Queens Bridget and Dinah are neither heroes nor heroines. It is impossible they should be. They do not resist. They succumb, suffer, fly to boarding-houses or mad-houses—go into hysterics—abandon house and home, and become wanderers and vagabonds—go a-lecturing, elope, or die!

"Turn them both away, Mrs. Damarin! I would be tormented with them no longer, if I were you; and you shall not be, if I can help it. Send them out of your house this minute, and Polly and I will do the work ourselves—won't we, Polly?" These were the courageous words of Bella, as she suddenly appeared in the kitchen, and sprang between Mrs. Damarin and two furious women, who were railing and gesticulating at her in a way that seemed to menace actual bodily harm. No goddess of freedom, nor Britannia, nor Minerva, with all her armor on, *could have made a more effective interposi-*

tion than did the girl of sixteen as thus she confronted the two tyrants in their very court. Her eye, with the power of a strong man's arm, forced both of them backward to a respectful distance, and her voice silenced them both.

"Pray go back, my dears," said Mrs. Damarin; "there's nothing the matter, only Bridget and Dinah don't understand me. I was explaining that too much soda in the water rotted the clothes, and they thought I found fault with their washing—that's all. There, you and Polly go to your school, and I'll soon arrange this."

"But why let them treat you in this manner?" returned Bella, keeping her position: "these women are getting worse and worse every day, and I really believe they'll harass you to death unless something is done. And we are going to do it—Polly and I. We two, if you will only show us how, and have patience until we become a little used to it, can do all the work of this house—can't we, Polly? We can and will!"

"Oh! can ye and will ye?" growled the daughter of Wolf Tone, in the tone of a wolf. "Be gorra, ye wouldn't do it long wid them lazy fingers o' your'n. Ah! ye beggar! I'm as good as you be, any day."

"Yes, yes!" cried she of the dark and darkening brow, "I'd jess like to see her do it. An' it's what sech trash is got to come to, and this one mout as well begin one time as another. For my part, I gives her up my place right now, and I's goin' to the city first boat comes down. Bridget, you may do as you please, but I tell you this child's goin' whar she kin git twenty-five dollars a month, and proper respect besides."

So they both went, and emancipation was accomplished. And from thenceforward the drudgery of that large household was performed by the two girls, with the direction and help of Mrs. Damarin. And thus *was* the path of her duty opened to the steps of Bella, and thus did they enter upon it.

At first the new arrangement was considered by the heads of the family as but a temporary one, to serve only until a couple of fresh torments could be engaged. But the volunteers were inspired with a sentiment, and they worked with a will; and though unpracticed fingers got blistered, and tender

nuckles became sore, and pains in the back were severe, they insisted on persevering, and insisted on triumphing. And at length, a change having been effected in the household which very much lightened the work, the new state of things was accepted as a permanent one.

The change in question consisted in the removal of all the farm workmen to separate quarters, in a new building which Mr. Damarin caused to be put up for that purpose, and where a German woman, the wife of one of them, kept house for the whole very nicely. But Robert Hagan was retained in the old house as a member of the family, for he had become quite a pet with them all.

The household labor was further alleviated by introducing the latest-contrived clothes mangle, boiler, and wringer, sweeper, duster, apple-parer, sausage-meat cutter, steamer, mangle, and various other doers, some of which the deposed tyrants had refused to use, while others were too complex or fragile to be trusted in their clumsy, careless hands; though all were found to work well when they were well worked. Foot-scrapers and mats were doubled at all the approaches, and every bit of floor not covered with carpet received three coats of wood-colored paint. Hoops and long skirts proving to be hindrances, the former were discarded during working hours, and the latter cut short. Both the girls were corn-fed and of good development, with feet and ankles that needed no screen, and hips that needed no exaggeration.

And when all the ameliorations had been introduced, and the workers got used to their task, it was found to be by no means a hard one. Six hours in the day proved sufficient to do all, and the leisure time was enjoyed by only faithful workers can enjoy leisure. Bella declared she had never been so happy in her life before, and Polly—who at her friend's suggestion had flung by hoops and cut off skirts, and would have cut off her head too if the other had requested it—agreed with her. They read, too, fully as much as before, and with far better zest and profit; for regular occupation steadied their nerves, and settled their minds into somewhat of the lymphatic condition a good

student loves to be in. And here should be named the books they read, for those books were forming the young readers. They were a portion of the library of the late Peyton Simms, Esq., which Mr. Damarin had chanced to bid off at an auction sale in Cincinnati, and this is the catalogue: *The Spectator*, the *Rambler*, Pope's "Iliad," "Robinson Crusoe," "Gil Blas," "Don Quixote," "Sir Charles Grandison," "Evelina," "Tom Jones," Scott's novels and poems, Paley's "Moral Philosophy," several volumes of the *European* and *Gentleman's Magazines*, Burns's works (expurgated), Cobbett's "Reformation," Fox's "Martyrs," Shakspeare, Butler's "Analogy," an odd volume of Swift, Bell's "British Theatre," "The Pilgrim's Progress," Baxter's "Saint's Rest," "Father Clement," "Plutarch's Lives," the "Travels of Anacharsis the Younger," and Cook's "Voyages." To this intellectual store Robert Hagan too was allowed free access, and read greedily. The effect on the mind of the youth was rather wonderful. At first, as all young readers will do, he surrendered himself completely into the hands of his author, and, questioning neither facts nor inferences, drifted with him. Afterward, as he discovered how inconsistent and contradictory printed matter could be, he became sorely puzzled in attempting to reconcile the different authorities one with another and each with all, or judge between them. But finally, though only after years of mental confusion, he learned the great art of thinking for himself, and became his own disciple and his own man.

Until the old negro came to live at Stone House all the heavy domestic work, the hewing of wood and drawing of water, commonly called "chores," had been done by Robert; but Hector insisting on his superior right to wait upon his young missis, unhappy Robert found himself supplanted in the position by one much better acquainted than he was with its duties. Duties!—is there no better word for the delightful occupation of going at Bella's bidding and coming at her call, of chopping wood and building fires for her, of pumping water, digging potatoes, shaking carpets, and stretching clothes-lines beneath her eye, by her directions, and for her commendation? O love's young dream! you

golden clouds and rosy mists can form and change as quickly, your tinted lights can dance and play as easily, your ineffable music can as entrancingly sound for him who does "chores" for his idol as for him who sings nonsense to her by soft moonlight, or talks it in the brilliancy of bougies or gas! There is equal *rapport* in both cases, and the chores are far the less tiresome to the intellect.

Robert found his banishment hard to bear. The opportunities of proximity to Bella of which Hector's coming deprived him would have been far less sweet to enjoy, and far less bitter to regret, were it not that she in her superiority had behaved toward him freely and naturally, so that it was given him to know her just as she was, without obscuration from coquetry or perverseness. He saw her as lover or husband might never see her—in the perfection of her innocence and truth. Poor lover! poor husband! you are both of you to be pitied, nor can either of you ever know why. To a lover, a mistress; to a husband, a wife; to Robert Hagan, doer of chores for Bella Johnston, a divinity.

As the spring approached, Robert occupied much of his leisure time in breaking his colt, for it was now more than three years old, and should be earning its own corn. As the breaking of horses on farms is usually done, it is no very severe discipline; but Hector, who, it seems, was an accomplished jockey, and had noticed the points of the young animal, inspired Robert to do the thing thoroughly; and by his instructions and assistance it was followed by such training to develop trotting qualities as the appliances at hand permitted.

One day, as they were scraping the heated and excited animal, after a trial, Hector said to the other (coining a prefix to carry into effect the latest constitutional amendment, and, in short, reconcile his sense of what was due to his own dignity as a citizen, and which forbade him to say "mass," with his sense of politeness, which forbade him to say simply "Robert"), "Misser Robert, I tells you wot it is: dis horse ain't no common breed. Don't you let nobody fool hoonaah out o' him, not *till you an' I knows more 'bout um. Dis look a' dat flank! dis look a' dem wedders!*

dis look a' dat eye and dat nostril and dat hair! You doesn't see none o' dem tings on no cold-blooded stock. I wish I knowed wot breed he was. Way did you git um?"

Robert was overjoyed at praise like this from a source like this. But the ancestry of the colt was not a pleasant subject; so, in order to turn the conversation, he asked what price Hector thought the animal could be sold for if he proved to be very swift indeed.

"Now don't hoonaah ax no shiah difficult questions. Mebby he'll go in tree minutes, and mebby in two-forty. When I knows zackly wot he kin do, den I kin put a price on um. But we mus' git a sulky an' de right fixens for trainin' 'fore any body kin tell much 'bout um. Wot's yer gwine to call um?"

It required a discussion a fortnight long to answer the simple question. At length "Major" was selected as a good, sonorous name, easily pronounced by Hector, and, as he said, "good to holler."

At the nearest wagon-maker's shop two old buggy wheels were found, with which a rude but tolerably light sulky was made; and Hector having cobbled from bits of old harness a "Dutch collar," the colt was put on a regular course of training. The track was the avenue, which was just a mile in length; and at the end nearest the house the family and farm people used to assemble after supper to witness the performance of Major and the enthusiasm of his trainer. And very enjoyable it was to see them come to the end of the stretch, the horse showing the vermilion of his dilating nostrils and the whites of his splendid eyes, and doing his very uttermost; while the driver, also with open nostrils and flashing eyes, perched triumphantly behind, pouring forth pleasant words of encouragement, such as these—"Go, go, you son-ob-a-gun! Go, go, for true! Pull foot, sinner, de debil's close behine! Wake snakes, de sun's a-risin'!"

By midsummer the Major was able to go his mile in three minutes, or a little less, and was still improving. The training developed his beauty as well as speed. Though but little more than fifteen hands in stature, his arching neck bore his head so high he seemed taller than he was. His face and

forehead expressed gentleness and intelligence almost beyond what is permitted a horse's physiognomy to express. Had they done any more, they would have been human. Mane and tail, long, full, and silken, were grandly carried. His color was chestnut-sorrel, unvaried in hair or hoof with the least spot of white, save one right in the middle of the forehead. Many came to see

him, and some offered prices that were so much beyond what was usual in that neighborhood, Hector with difficulty prevented Robert from selling. Mr. Damarin, observing the effects of the negro's jockeyship, wished to put some of his own colts under his training; but Hector shook his head and said, "It's no use, Sir; dey isn't got de blood in um."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Now what does all this nonsense mean
Of 'birth' and 'blood' and 'breeding'?
Is it of divers clays we're made,
Or is it in the kneading?
Or comes it of the partial stars?
Or comes it of our feeding?"



ONE Sunday afternoon, when Robert and Hector were alone together, seated on the steps of the piazza at the back of the house, Robert said, "I wish, Hector, you would tell me what you mean by blood. All blood is red, for any thing I can see, and all horses have enough of it. What has it to do with fast trotting, I would like to know?"

"Dis yerry!" exclaimed the negro. "Hoonah kin read de Bible, an' dunno wot blood mean! Den I mus' splain to hoonah. Ebry body knows, I spec, dat it's de blood wot makes de bones an' muscle an' sinners an' hoofs an' hair ob a hoss an' ebry oder critter. Berry well: if we saws off Major's shin bone an' looks at de grain ob it, it'll be dis

as smove an' fine an' strong as ibory—as a fine-toof comb. Berry well: now saw off ole John's great big log o' wood ob a shin, an' it'll be dis like any oder common bone—full o' little holes, an' sorf an' rough. An' it's de same way wid ebry ting from inside to out—from de marrer to de hair. Now does any body s'pose dat if Major's sire an' dam was common stock, dey could hab a chile like him? No, Sir; dey wouldn't hab de blood to make um—no mo' dan dat twine string in my shoe kin be strong like sewin' silk, no mo' dan a field nigger kin be like Hector, no mo' dan a cracker* kin be a gentleman, or de buckrat people 'bout yere kin be like Miss Bella—an' dat we knows berry well's impossible." The last words were spoken with lowered voice, as if to avoid hurting the neighborhood's feelings.

"According to what you say, there must have been two Adams and two Eves," said the listener, more touched by the illustrations of the lecturer on pedigree than interested in his main argument. "The Bible don't say so. According to it, God made of one flesh Miss Bella's family and all us folks about here."

"An' is de Bible a hoss book, den? Wot's it got to do wid trottin' stock? Tell me dat. I wasn't talkin' religion; I was talkin' hoess. De Bible don't talk hoess; 'e talk religion. Now wot's de use o' 'kin' shish nonsense,

* Listen.

* A country bumpkin.

Misser Robert? I tell you wot de good book do say, dough. 'E say no man kin git wool off a hog's back, no mo' kin he make a silk puss out ob a sow's ear."

"I don't care," said the other disputant. "You can't make me believe there's any such difference in people as you would make out. One man—one white man, anyhow—is as good as another."

"Oh, my goodness!" abruptly exclaimed Hector, looking toward the gate that opened from the avenue into the back-yard. "Well, if I eber did in all my born day! I tought I see poor white trash befo', an' I seen a heap o' soccostee crackers comin' to beg rough rice an' steal chickens, but I neber see shish ting as dis!"

Looking in the direction Hector's eyes went, Robert saw, outside the gate, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone in shape of Bill Hagan, his father, and Betsey, his mother, each mounted on a horse such as could have been borrowed nowhere else than in Smoky Creek, each attired very much as when last described, except that the woman had on her head a calico sun-bonnet, and both of them wearing a solemn and still expression of countenance, and sitting on their quiet steeds with dignity and ease. Neither of them said a word.

"Does you know who dem is?" inquired Hector, while Robert rose from where he was sitting and approached the dreadful couple with a sinking heart. No glance of recognition came from either parent as their improved and almost transformed offspring drew near, until he spoke, and then the weak smile that passed across their features stirred them as a lazy zephyr might ripple the surface of the Dead Sea.

"Won't you get off," asked Robert, faintly, "and walk in?"

No reply was made, but Bill turned and looked toward a third person, who had kept in the background, and, having dismounted, was tying his horse to the fence a little way off. This person now approached. He was a city-dressed man, well trimmed, and of smooth aspect. About forty years old he seemed, but was of that peculiar modification of the sanguine temperament which confers almost perpetual youth and inexperience. *His large, protruding gray eyes in-*

dicated a voluble tongue, and the complacent turn up of the corners of his mouth showed the habitual and confirmed optimist.

"This is—Mr. Robert Hagan, I suppose?" he said, coming up and taking Robert's hand, though with hesitation.

"Yes, Sir."

"I'm happy to know you, Robert," he said, still holding the hand, and squeezing it. "Well, Robert, the old folks thought they ought not to act in a little matter which I proposed to them without first consulting you. So we all came right along. In fact, I preferred they should do so, and myself proposed it."

"Now he's lying!" remarked Bill, quietly.

"Well, well," continued the other, not the least offended, "I think so now, at any rate, since I see what a fine young man Robert is; and I feel confident he and I will not disagree about the business."

"Shall we go in, old woman?" inquired Hagan.

"Yes, I s'pose so," snapped she: "I don't see no good staying out here. I'm awful tired, and starved 'most to death too."

Her son helped her from the horse, so far as she would permit, while her husband also alighted, without shifting the rifle from his right shoulder, and marched before the others toward the house, which he would have entered by the principal door; but Robert ran before him, and turned the procession into a detached wash-shed, in his shame shamefully lying to the effect that it was the office; that all business must be transacted in it; that the house was locked, and all the family gone to church. Hastily providing his parents with seats at opposite corners of the fire-place, he raked the ashes forward, so as to cover the entire hearth, and then disappeared, promising to bring his visitors something to eat. He was not out of the door before Betsey had lighted a pipe, which she withdrew from its sheath in her bosom, and begun to smoke.

"Got any tobacco?" demanded Bill of the city man, who was lighting a cigar, to smoke in self-defense against the fumes the woman was pouring forth.

"I believe I have one plug left," said the other, unrolling one from a paper he drew from his pocket, and smiling as he offered it.

Hagan took the plug, slowly drew out his jackknife, opened it, cut off a piece large enough for a quid, returned the piece in question to the giver, cut off another quid, put that into his own mouth, and then thrust the remaining portion of the plug into his pocket, where it fell into company with five other plugs of the same length, each of which had, since morning, been acquired in the very same way.

While eating of the cold ham and bread-and-butter brought in by Robert from the locked-up house, which they did enormously, the couple refrained from all conversation, and an attempt by the other visitor to open the business that brought them there was checked by Hagan's growling, "Stop, now, till I get done."

The disturbed mind of Robert improved the silence by striving, agonizing, and floundering in attempts to recover its equilibrium. The two living apparitions there present were as awful to confront as if they had been ghosts of the dead. In fact, the chief objection to them was that they were real, and not subject to fits of vanishing, as shadowy ghosts are. So appalled was he that it is no derogation from his goodness of heart to state that the idea of parricide and matricide came whizzing through his head, and a hundred well-detailed and circumstantial false stories, by which his relation to the authors of his being might be denied and concealed, followed after; for thought is swift in a distressful case, somewhat as it is said to be in the act of drowning; and if ever the devil is busy, it is when poor relations pop suddenly upon an ambitious young snob. Before the time for talking had come, however, his plan of action—his theory of the case, as lawyers would say—was settled on. It was to tell the truth, and behave with the duty of a son, if he could not show the affection of one.

"Now, Bob," said Hagan, brushing the crumbs from his beard with a single motion of his hand, and replacing in his cheek the quid so requisite to his mental processes, "I want to know if what folks tell me is true. They say you've got learning. Is that a fact?"

"I have some learning," answered Robert. "I can read and write. I have cipher-

ed almost through the arithmetic, and studied a little geography, and—"

"What's the use of talking in that fashion? Why, you waste words like a woman—or like him," looking toward the city gentlemen, who was dying for a chance to waste a volume of them. "Have you got learning, I say?"

"Yes, I have."

"Very well; why didn't you say so before? If you've got learning, I want to ask you just one question. This gentleman has been barking around Flaming Rock for a week or more, like a fice dog round a snake-hole, trying to get me into a trade of some kind that I don't very well understand; only he's to have a deed of the Rock and all my land, and I'm to have—well, pretty much nothing at all. Now the question I want you to answer is, how had I better get shut of him? Shall I shoot him, or shall I trade with him?"

"All but the shoot!" derisively broke in Betsey. "The fact of the matter, Bob, 's jest here. This dod-durned scamp is going to cheat us out of house and home. He's after the place; he's after it with papers, he jest is; he's got 'em in his pocket. And your good-for-nothing pap's bound to let him have it, too, unless you stop him. You've got larning, you say, and I know you kin stop him if you want to. Yes, yes" (to Hagan), "I heerd him talking whisky to you yesterday, and it ain't for nothing you tucked the patent* into your hat before quittin' home. But I'll follow you up, both of you, clear to the jumping-off place; and I'll never sign nary scrap of a deed—not for no dozen caliker gowns. You've sold off one thing after another to get whisky, till nothing's left but the bare ground, and now you want to sell that."

"Stop there! You've got through your story!" exclaimed, in a firm manner, her husband, who was unwilling to hear the peroration. "Now, Bob, I want you to hear what the stranger's got to say. Listen sharp."

The stranger, verifying Betsey's accusation, opened his story by taking from his pocket-book a paper, partly printed and

* Of a conveyance of land from the government.

partly written, and reading it under Robert's eye. It was a lease or grant to Puffing Gassaway and his assigns, for a term of ninety-nine years, of the exclusive right to mine, etc., in Flaming Rock, to obtain the shale, schist, or slate of which said rock was formed, for the purpose of distilling the same for the production of oil and other valuable substances—on condition, however, to render and deliver to the lessor one-tenth “*of the crude product*,” to be received by him, and removed without unreasonable delay.

“The benefit to your father,” said Mr. Gassaway, “of the working of his shale property, under the arrangement proposed, will be perfectly enormous. When we consider the richness of the material, yielding, as it does, upward of thirty gallons of oil to the ton, the cheapness with which it can be mined—lying open to the air, as it does, and costing to distill but six and one-fourth cents per gallon of oil—the immense quantity of it, every one of the forty acres comprising the tract containing enough in every foot of depth to produce a thousand barrels of oil, and in the whole three hundred feet of depth three hundred thousand barrels, or, say, for the forty acres, twelve millions of barrels, worth, per barrel, for lubricating purposes, twenty dollars at the very least, or two hundred and forty millions of dollars in all, of which one-tenth would be your share—you see what a big thing it is!”

And for half an hour longer the eloquent vaporizer and lubricator ran on, conjuring up visions of wealth that affected all three of his listeners in spite of themselves, and to the serious detriment of their faculties of judgment.

Then Hagan, with deliberation and dignity, cross-examined the witness upon each of the facts he had assumed for the premises of the argument, and did not finish until Robert with his slate and pencil had verified each one of the magnificent estimates.

“Now let me understand,” he proceeded, “what I am to get. Read that part of the paper, Bob; read it all by yourself, without any body's showing you how.” Robert read till his father stopped him at the words “*crude product*,” saying, “What do you write *in Dutch* for? What's the meaning of them words? It's all plain enough English till

you come to what I'm to receive, and then it's ‘*crude product*.’”

“It means whisky; I know it does,” cried Mrs. Hagan.

Mr. Gassaway declared the words were good English, perfectly harmless, and indispensably requisite in all mining grants, and signified that Mr. Hagan should receive one-tenth part of all the oil to be distilled, but should receive it in its crude state, and without its being refined. Robert, who had run for his dictionary, decided the words to be good English, and, his mind straggling off on the collateral issue that had been raised, he fell in with Mr. Gassaway's construction, that they meant oil.

To his surprise his unlearned father differed from them, and declared it meant shale; and that all the rent he would receive under the instrument would be one-tenth of a heap of shale, of which he already owned the whole. In this predicament old Hector was brought in. Hector, after listening with folded arms and fixed eyes while the paper was read to him twice, and having heard Robert's explanation from the dictionary, agreed perfectly with “de old gentleman.”

“I believe I will shoot you!” cried Hagan, in a voice of thunder, and reaching out for his gun. “You want to get my property into your hands, and pay me with a few shovelfuls of my own dirt. Clear out of this!” he shouted, starting up, “for I'm getting dangerous.”

“Bully for you!” exclaimed Betsey. “Do shoot him, that's a dear good man, and we'll pitch his carcass into the river; it's mighty handy jest here.”

But the fury of Mr. Hagan was only simulated, and he allowed himself to be pacified. Gassaway declared he meant no insult nor deception, and showed the objectionable words to be in print, the same as in all the other printed blanks with which his pocket-book was filled. “If you'll only listen to me, Mr. Hagan,” he said, “I've another proposition to make that will meet all objections, I'm sure.”

But the other would hear no new proposal from that quarter. “It's my turn now,” he said. “Bob, how much money did he figure out he would have after he'd tried the fat out of the whole farm, and sold it?”

"Two hundred and forty millions of dollars," was the quotient.

"What would one dollar out of every thousand of that be?"

"Two hundred and forty thousand," Bob replied, without needing to cipher.

"Now quarter that, and how much do you get?"

"Sixty thousand dollars."

"Very well: now I'll tell you what I'll do: you fetch to my house a barrel of whisky and ten pound of tobacco, and I'll sign a writing, which my son shall write with his own hand, that will give you the privilege of buying the property any time within six months from now if you'll pay me, cash down, sixty thousand dollars. That's all you can do with me, and I don't want to hear another word from you, except it's yes or no."

Gassaway reflected for a few minutes, or pretended to do so, then answered "Yes."

The paper was written by Robert, after his father's dictation, and read as follows:

"June 1, 1867.

"In consequence of whisky and tobacco to my satisfaction, I promise to make a deed to Puffing Gassaway, or any other man he'll say, of Flaming Rock and all the rest of my farm in Smoky Creek, containing forty acres, be the same more or less. But he must pay me for it, and that within six months from to-day, sixty thousand dollars, or it's no trade. The title shall be good.

"P.S.—My wife must have a new calico dress for putting her mark."

After the paper had been drafted, corrected, and rewritten it was signed by Hagan with his mark, sealed with a pen-and-ink seal, and witnessed by Robert. The speculator's fingers itched after it, for it was just what he wanted; but though he offered to pay down a money equivalent for the family stores, whose delivery at the domicile was made a condition precedent, he could obtain no modification of the covenant. And when the three visitors departed, it and the patent

of the land kept fellowship in the crown of the covenantor's hat.

The unlearned may sneer at the tenor of the simply expressed document; but any good lawyer will tell them it has all the requisites, and contains all the parts of valid and sufficient covenant for the conveyance of real property.

Before Hagan went away he took his son aside and propounded to him, in consideration of his "learning," one more question—namely, whether, in view of the enormous sum stipulated for in it, the nature and rather sulphurous reputation of the property to which it related, and the mysterious conduct of the stranger in whose favor it was made, the document just signed might not amount in law to a league with the devil, subjecting the soul of the covenantor to foreclosure and perdition? "For," remarked the prudent inquirer, "I don't want any such infernal after-clap as that, you know." Robert quieted his apprehensions by deciding the legal point, as gravely as it was put, in the negative.

"Very well, then. Now, one thing more. Supposing the fool should come back before the six months is out, and pay down the cash, what shall I do with it? Would you take care of it for me and keep it safe?"

The son promised he would, and the father mounted his horse and followed after his companions. As he rode slowly down the avenue, erect as a prince, carrying his weapon gracefully, wearing his pendent rage with independent air, Robert, looking after him, had a shade more of filial respect on his countenance than when he greeted his arrival a few hours before. There is something in high values, even speculative and contingent values, that invests the possessor with a degree of respectability, as a sharer, to a certain measure, in the sum total of earthly power, might, majesty, and dominion, be the same more or less.



CHAPTER XIV.



HALF-WAY down the side of the ravine, and partly imbedded in it, was Mrs. Damarin's dairy, or spring-house, as it was usually called; though there was no spring there, except one artificially created by conducting into a wide, shallow basin cut in the single flag of thick stone forming the floor a stream of cold water from the wastage of the adjoining ice-house, that was imbedded still deeper into the bank. In this basin the pans of milk were placed—pans of Alderney milk, be it observed. It was a very pretty dairy, of drab sandstone, like the house, and had been built within the year by Mr. Damarin, who had spared no cost to make it worthy of those who were to occupy and manage it. The slope around it was well turfed, to exclude all plants that might exhale rank odors to be a nuisance to the thickening cream. And though a few vines trained over its Swiss roof might have looked picturesque, yet nothing but grass was allowed to grow near the building, except a few large elms whose foliage was one-third of it mistletoe. An almost constant movement of air up or down the ravine, and

the evaporation of the rock-bedded stream in its bottom, helped to render the place comfortable and agreeable even on the hot afternoon in August when this chapter bears date.

"Oh dear! I do wish this butter would come!" Bella exclaimed, as she dashed from her forehead some beads that might have been diamonds and pearls, if they had not been the sweat of her brow and the splashing of butter-milk, but without desisting from her labor at the latest patent contrivance for hastening the coming butter. "I don't think this churn is near as good as the last." (She had tried and discarded six others already.) "I wish it *would* come!"

"And I wish brother William would come!" was the amendment offered by Polly, as she kindly pushed her friend aside and took her place at the machine, which, with fresh strength, she put to an accelerated motion. "Rest a little, dear; you are tired," she said.

Polly at the churn was a sight good to see. Beneath her brown linen apron she wore a kind of short gown of pink and a petticoat of white—a petticoat, but ne'er a hoop. Her hair was put out of the way in some hasty manner that did not prevent a few tresses of it from escaping, and producing an effect art could never compass. Her teeth of ivory showed themselves through lips parted with hard breathing; and the flush from exertion, controlled by a fine circulation and healthy skin, touched only where it should, and that delicately though warmly, leaving to the white all of its proper domain, which was exceeding proper and brilliant.

As she churned, her muscular power—namely, her vital heat, which Tyndall says is but a mode of motion, passing down by her arms, entered into the cream she was

agitating, and into the little globes of oil which it forced to separate themselves from the caseine, water, etc.; entered into the floating lumps, yellow as thrice-molten gold, into which those globes afterward aggregated; pervaded and held in cohesion, refined and perfumed the mass, combined of them all, which in the end she scooped out and piled in triumph on the tray. The warmth of her very heart had gone into the lump, making the particles of it love one another. The butter was of Polly, and Polly was in the butter. Whoever was afterward so blessed as to eat of it, ate Polly, partook of her quality, and became more excellent for the eating.

But if Polly at the churn was the beau-ideal of a dairy-maid, Bella, at the window, was the beau-ideal of a dairy queen, such as Marie Antoinette was when, with noble women for her handmaids, she ministered in the *cr  merie* of the *Petit Trianon*. And something like them must every fit dairy woman be; for butter is a most sensitive touch-stone for detecting all unsweetness, however imponderable it may be; and whoever tastes the butter made in any country tests the very nature of its women in respect to neatness and skill.

"Perhaps he decides to accept that consulship they offered him, and will remain abroad for several years," remarked Bella, after a pause, looking fixedly at a knot in the trunk of a tree across the road.

"No, indeed, he will not; and I wish you wouldn't talk so, Bella, unless you want to make me cry."

"Then why didn't he write you of the day when he might be expected, so you could be ready to receive him? You wouldn't like very well to meet him in the plight you are in now." And she removed her eyes from the knot in the tree, and cast them, not upon Polly's dress, but upon her own, which was just like it.

"I wouldn't care if he did, now the butter has come."

"Oh, has it?" said Bella; "then let me work it." And taking her place at the low table on which the tray rested, while the other went to the house for hot water to scald the churn, her hands and arms were soon deep in the plastic Alderney gold, which

she kneaded and rolled and patted with a will.

The surface of the milk in the pans that stood in the pool jarred into wrinkles at the sound of a steamer's whistle, which was soon followed by that of a bell. The noise of the whistle meant nothing, but the bell meant somebody was going to land at Stone House. Bella listened while she kneaded; then stopped kneading to listen. Polly did not return with the hot water. Bella grew anxious, and flushed up. "If that girl," she said, "leaves me out here without any warning of his coming, I'll never speak to her again as long as I live. That's her scream! He certainly has come. Good Heavens! what shall I do?"

Soon Polly's voice was again heard. It approached the dairy too; and with it were other voices. "Here she is," shouted Polly, as, running ahead, she reached the doorway; and the next moment her brother stood there too, looking into the little apartment, whose inmate, too proud to show mortification, and almost too proud to feel it, confronted him with dignity from the opposite side of the table, and affably received and returned his greeting without attempting to withdraw her hands from the butter-tray.

"I am very glad you have arrived in safety," she said. "You bring happiness to your home. Pray excuse my strange appearance. But perhaps it is well you should begin at once to get used to seeing your sister and me in what is our usual wear during work-hours; though really we ought to have been differently dressed to honor your return."

Now the traveler had seen some tolerable toilets within the last two years, in comparison with which the holiday attire of the two country girls might not have appeared very magnificent; but in their present costumes they had the whole troop of fashion at a disadvantage, and were as irresistible as they were incomparable. And even though he had brought with him tender memories of European beauty and grandeur, the sight of her who now stood within the little dairy, dressed *   la mode* Bella, would have wiped them from his tablets forever.

The newly arrived found much to wonder at and praise in the improved domestic

rangements of Stone House, both without and within. Evidently a refined taste had been served by a bold hand, and the respectable old farm-house been transformed into a genteel mansion. His greatest wonder, however, was that all should be the doing of the helpless and self-indulgent girl he had left there two years before; for all gave the credit to Bella. Nor could he help suspecting the whole was only a prolonged pleasantry, and that before long the actors in it would get tired of play that was so much like work, and surrender their duties into the hands of mercenaries.

"No, no," said Bella, when he ventured to suggest this. "I will not speak for Polly; but as to myself, I should be miserable if I gave up my work. Worse than that, I should fear I would go mad," she added, with a sad and bitter expression. "But don't think it is only for reasons peculiar to myself," she said, while a pleasant animation chased the clouds away, "that I would do as I am doing. The condition of a family which lives subject to the whims and vapors of coarse and violent women domesticated in it is so terrible that exemption is cheaply purchased with five or six hours daily of light and diversified labor performed for those one loves. There is peace in this house since the furies were chased out of it. Your dear mother there has grown five years younger, though doing with her own hands twice as much as ever before."

"I declare," said Polly, "if Bella don't talk like a book. I was reading yesterday in the 'Vicar of Wakefield' the conversation of the two city ladies, and it wasn't a bit better than hers."

"She has studied her subject," remarked Mr. Damarin. "For my part," he added, "I am willing the girls should give it up, and go back to the old plan, if the work is too hard for them, though I must say it will be a sorry day for me when they do so."

"They will have to do so when they get married," said his wife.

"Or go away," thought Bella.

"But why is it," said the general, "that when I commanded a brigade of twenty-five hundred men of all kinds, I was able to hold *them in obedience and order*? Or if you say *that was because of martial law*, then I re-

call that one winter, when I was not twenty years old, father put me over a gang of sixty men, whom he employed in clearing land, and that there was very little trouble in managing them. Hardly ever did any of them refuse to do what was required of them, or give me an offensive word. And the Irishmen were the most cheerful and pleasant workers of any. And yet two of the sisters of such men are too many for any mistress of a house to manage."

"You'd better try it," said his mother.

"Thanks to Mrs. Damarin's counsel," resumed Bella, "we have been able to so organize our work as to render it not disagreeable; on the contrary, we find it full of interest. Every day brings something to vary it, and generally our pleasantest morning thoughts on awaking are of the duties of the day. As to its being unrefined and unlady-like to help one's self—and that is about all doing house-work amounts to—it's nonsense to say so. I have read that whoever is his own lawyer has a fool for a client, and whoever is his own physician has a fool for a patient; but I insist that whoever is his own servant has a wise man for his master."

"Doesn't she talk like a book, brother?"

"Few books talk as well, Polly," said he.

Bella blushed a little, and reminded him that the tea-things had long been put away, and it was time he should fulfill his promise to tell them of his travels. But Mrs. Damarin insisted that Willy must be tired, and should go to bed. So Willy went to bed, fell asleep, and dreamed he was a Turk, and sat cross-legged on a divan, drinking coffee; that some of it went the wrong way, and suffocated him to death; that after his funeral was over he went to a place where beautiful girls waited on him, baking rolls and churning butter for him, and bringing him coffee that didn't go down the wrong way; that a voice said, "Here coffee never goes down the wrong way; but all are immortal. Here Bridget or Dinah can never enter; so all are happy." And looking in the faces of the houriis, he saw that each of them was a Bella Johnston, and knew he was in Paradise.

The following evening, according to prom-

ise, the general began his story. All travelers like to tell their stories, but every body does not care to hear them. Especially do most of the stayers at home dislike to hear one just returned from a migration with the American herd through the easy highways of Europe talk to them out of hand-books. But the circle of listeners at Stone House were so ignorant of the actual condition of the great nations of civilization that news from there was to them news indeed. As Damarin had not written away what he saw in long, hard-to-read letters on thin paper, nor journalized it out of mind either, what he had learned inhered in memory, and was well arranged on its shelves. So when, on the second evening after his return, he began at the beginning, and proceeded to relate every thing in the order of its occurrence, he opened to his hearers a most agreeable book, and the evenings on the porch devoted to the entertainment were continued for a long while. Polly called them the Arabian Nights. Robert Hagan was never absent if he could help, and old Hector was a humble listener, from a seat on one of the steps.

Despite his modesty, the hero of the history could not keep out of it that he had been received into some very good society, which raised him not a little in the estimation of one, at least, of his hearers, who caught herself asking herself as she listened, and sometimes looked, whether, after all, he were not good enough gentleman for all practical purposes?

Ay, Bella; and why not?

Another question: Why should not you fall in love with that gentleman—fall deeply in, loving with heart and mind and truth and faith, conjugially and forever? Let all the world hear and answer, and if any know of just cause or impediment, why, etc., etc.

There were two that may be mentioned. One of them was her fixed idea that he was socially her inferior. But this idea was every day getting unfixed. It was vanishing before her growing common-sense. It, with other like fancies, was being worked off at the tips of her fingers—swept out like rubbish from the chambers of her brain—dusted away like cobwebs. The other was his recollection of the terrible fits of temper she used to be afflicted with. But this recollec-

tion was fading out in the sunshine of her present sweet and gentle deportment, and the temper itself was undergoing change, partly from the same causes that were moving the fixed idea, and partly from a healthier state of the nerves resulting from continued residence away from the fiery and enervating climate of her birth. Yes, climate does often thus control the moral through the physical organization. A Northern cow carried to the low country of South Carolina will give milk as usual during the first year. The second year she will give but half the quantity, and will kick over the pail. The third she will toss the milker on her horns, and dry up. Kill and dissect such an animal, and the seat of the trouble will be found not in a bad heart, but in a diseased liver.

It is very easy to fall in love, if one will only give her mind to it. In study, it is by bending your mind on the subject that you come to master it. In love, you bend your mind on the object, and it will be pretty sure to master you. The way you lean you will be apt to fall. But how if you lean the reverse way, as Bella did, who began by hating Damarin? Why, then the recoil will carry you back again, and farther, and aversion very soon become *penchant*. Now she, as if ignorant of the principles just laid down, or else quite regardless of the consequences, did give her mind to his narrative, and in doing so gave it to him. The tones of his voice had free access to her ear, and the varying expressions of his handsome face could not be, or were not, excluded from her eye. His own personal adventures, thoughts, and feelings, as he narrated them, became, through unavoidable sympathy, for the moment at least, her own. And the end of all this, in the case of any ordinary mortal, a fool might have foreseen. But this girl Bella was not an ordinary mortal, and no one might safely predict aught concerning her.

If, however, one should hazard a forecast of her case, and supposing she did really fall in love, it might be something in this way: at first there would be felt merely a gentle exaltation of the spirits, whose true cause being not yet recognized by the subject of it, would be attributed to this, that, and the

other outward circumstance. The weather would be thought fairer than usual, the garden flowers more blooming and fragrant, companions pleasanter and kinder, duties more light and more interesting, the future more cheerful, and the past less sad. Following this a consciousness of happiness would supervene, deep-seated somewhere in the breast, so delightful to experience that, while half recognizing its true origin, she would dread to look into it lest some peril to its continuance be discovered: the present would seem so sufficient that both past and

future would be purposely curtained—the sadness of the one no longer worth a regret, and the promised joys of the other scarcely worth a hope. Thirdly would come a stage wherein, the truth being fully disclosed, and the sweetness at the heart being felt to be in the nature of a bondage and a fate, there would be an access of perversity, in which she would become unmanageable even by the most skillful hand, and uncontrollable even by her own strong will. Pails would be kicked over, and milkers tossed sky-high!

CHAPTER XV.

"Devotion wafts the mind above,
But heaven itself descends in love."

ALTHOUGH Robert Hagan had boasted to Hector that one man was as good as another, every day of his life he became more aware that William Damarin was greatly his superior. And as the knowledge came to him through observing the daily intercourse between Damarin and Bella, it brought no pleasant sensation. He had early habituated himself to consider her too exalted almost for his thoughts to reach. The conversations between her and her friend in the days when he was their bridle-boy had too fully apprised him how high she placed herself above the generality of her fellow-creatures for him to deem himself a fellow fit for a creature such as she. And however she had modified her notions since then, he was accustomed to regard his sentiments toward her only as a sort of adoration for a divinity. Yet lowly as he placed himself on the steps of her throne, it was hard to see her approached as an equal by one whose devotions were not worship—very hard.

Robert became melancholy. He withdrew very much within himself. He retired oftener to his room, and from the saddle-bags took the photograph and consulted it, as if for consolation. The eyes were always kind, looking out at him with even more than kindness, but never with love.

About that time, the natural revulsion from wickedness of all kinds, engendered by a long war, having produced a general

awakening on the subject of religion through the country, the Rev. Mr. Adamsfall, the Presbyterian minister who has been named, felt it to be his duty to preach up a revival in his church. He was a mild and amiable man, and though holding severely to the Breckinridge theology, was loath to resort to the extreme measure of expounding it in its fullness save in extreme cases. But dancing and card-playing and gayety in other forms were becoming so alarmingly prevalent, something must be done. Besides, other congregations were enjoying revivals, and the members of his did not wish to be outdone.

Robert was in a fit state to be brought under those influences which prevail in a season of religious excitement. Little was needed to mature the despondency he already felt into that condition of ripe despair whose dark shadow extends into eternity, entitling the despairing soul to a place on the anxious seat, and whose reaction, properly directed, becomes the religious ecstasy. He was accordingly one of the very first to be influenced. Mr. and Mrs. Damarin were already in the church. Their son and Bella, though frequently attending on the preaching, did not seem to be touched by it. Probably they were neither gay enough nor sad enough to be affected as they should. But Polly was wheat ripe for the sickle, and with hanging head and weeping eyes made her

way timidly to the front on the very evening when Robert rose and told his "experience." Promoted after this to be an assistant in the good work, it became his duty to question Polly all about her sins, their number and weight, promise consolation to her, stand by and kneel by her, sing and pray for her and with her. And as the attendance of the other members of the family gradually slackened toward the close of the excitement, he and Polly alone together went faithfully every evening to enjoy their newly gotten religion. Polly declared, with tears in her eyes, she had never known happiness before. She loved every step of the way to the church, and every inch of the way back; and the distance was two and a half miles.

Poor Polly! Pretty Polly!

His religion was a great consolation to Robert. It strengthened him too.

Much as Polly loved her religion, she did not forget other people. She was ready at every opportunity to be out of the way when her brother and Bella might be thereby left alone together. Bella did not like this, and reproved her friend for it, sometimes softly, but sometimes pretty sharply; though sometimes she did not appear to notice the slipping away at all, or forgot to reprove for it. Mr. and Mrs. Damarin did the same as their daughter. The truth is, they had all set their hearts on the match. But old Hector had not set his upon it; and old Hector was there, and could not be sent away. He was there in capacity of dragon. He was there and here and every where—popping up from under the edge of the river-bank, or stepping out from behind a tree in the orchard or road, or approaching the young people in the garden, to offer a flower or fruit, when neither fruit nor flower was wanted—bolting into the dairy and proposing to help his "young missis" churn, in the absence of Polly, who usually took turns with her, or when unseen in some near covert, whistling or singing or cleaning knives, to make his neighborhood known.

Poor Damarin! the task was sufficiently difficult to make his approaches to Bella's heart, and, supposing that gained, to her hand, without being hindered by the inopportune negro. Twenty times he was near coming to the interrogation point, but was

as often baffled by the waywardness of the woman he loved, or the in-the-waywardness of the black man he hated.

At length the avowal came, and the proposal, and though clumsily enough done—a woman or a man not in love could have done ten times as well—must be met. They were riding home from church together at the time, and had just turned into the avenue. Bella remained silent. "Did you hear me?" he gasped, almost inaudibly. Bella was silent. With an apple twig, carried for a whip, she brushed a portion of her horse's mane the wrong way, then brushed it back, again to the right side, then to the wrong side again. The cause seemed decided, and in favor of the suitor. "Speak!" he cried, gaining courage and voice; "do speak, Bella! for God's sake tell me yes!" She slowly lifted her head, that had bent over the mane as she combed it, and looked him full in the face with eyes full of unmistakable love, more of love than he had dreamed of before as dwelling in woman or angel. His accepted heart almost burst with joy. "No, no," he said, "do not speak a word. We know each other now, Bella. Thank you, and thank God!" And he put his arm about her waist and kissed her, which can be very well done on horseback, if the cavalier is adroit—that is to say, if he rides on the right side of his mistress—and she is willing. After this Bella gently detached his arm, and said, in a perfectly calm, though deep and strange voice, "But I *must* speak now, General Damarin." The voice was not Bella's, neither were the words she was about to speak. Utter them not! utter them not! It is folly, perversity, and bitter pride would use those beautiful lips, warm from their first touch of love. Bella! Bella! close them firmly until your spell of evil shall have passed over!

"Rain, come wet me; sun, come dry me;

Go 'way, white man, don' you come nigh me,"

chanted Hector from a broken hay-stack beside the avenue, on the top of which he was pretending to be at work arranging a "cap" to shed a coming rain, no signs of which were visible, though. He was handling the pitchfork in a frantic way, tossing the hay in every direction, while his eyes and lips stuck out, and his great nostrils dilated quite preternaturally. The momen-

after Bella, turning her head, caught sight of him, a mass of the hay, which he had flung perpendicularly upward, descended on his head and shoulders, covering them completely. Bella broke into a laugh, and whipped her horse till he galloped away from Damarin, who did not overtake her until the horse-block was reached. There, as she continued to laugh, while he could not for his life command a smile, the advantage remained with her, and she escaped into the house and got to her room without a further word.

Mrs. Damarin and Polly, who were on the look-out, and had seen the way she alighted, and her appearance as she passed swiftly by them and ascended the stairs, eagerly seized on the general and hurried him into the parlor, that they might hear his report and enjoy every word of it, for they felt sure he had succeeded. Nor did the story he had to tell, and which he was forced to give in all its details as the only way to make them comprehend the exact measure of his success, alter their opinion. Polly was about to fly to the arms of her friend, to welcome her as a sister; but her mother restrained her, saying, "You had better not go yet, my dear; she is not ready, perhaps, to talk with you on this subject. And, William, if you take my advice, you won't press the matter any more for a day or two, unless you observe the signs to be entirely favorable."

Meanwhile Hector had knocked at the locked door of Bella's chamber, and knocked several times without its being opened. At last he called to her, and when she found it was he, was admitted.

"Why, Hector, what do you want?" she inquired, with a most severe dignity.

"Oh, missis—Miss Bella!" he broke out, "it won't nebbber do—it won't nebbber do in dis world."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"My young missis mustn't marry no Yankee ablishun officer. Tink ob de 'spectability ob our family. Tink wot ole missis say, s'posin' she was a-libbin. Tink wot ole massa say. Tink wot Mass Ned, dat's gone dead—tink wot him say; and den Mass

Charles, he shoot um dead for true. Don't do um, Miss Bella, don't do um. Oh, Gorra mighty, don't do um!"

By this time the extravagance of his words and manner, despite their earnestness, made her begin to smile. "Why, my good old friend," she said, "if I understand what you are talking about, it is something about which I have not needed your advice. There! you needn't say any thing more on the subject. You may go now."

"I isn't a-gwine to go," he persisted. "I mus' talk, an' I's gwine to talk. Nobody cep'n Hector's here for min' hoonah, an' I no gwine for to let hoonah do no shiah wrong ting. Dis yer family is berry good people. But dey isn't no fuss family. Dey's got land, but dey nebbber hab nary nigger, no time. Dey's workin' people, dey is; dey isn't true an' true gentlemen an' ladies, like you' own. Dey nebbber trabble wid coach-an'-fo' an' two footman an' six outrider, like you' ole gran'-fader b'long's* to. Dey nebbber keep no race-hoss. Dey no put no tree tousand dollar silber plate on de table, like ole missis b'long's to. Dey nebbber fight no duel. Dey dunno who is dère gran'fader. Dey isn't 'spectable, missis; dey's low people."

"Hector! stop talking in that way!" cried Bella, in anger. "Don't let me hear you say another word against my friends. They are as good as I am—yes, and as respectable as any body."

"Berry well, Miss Bella," he rejoined, in a solemn manner, as if closing one chapter and about opening another. "Now I tell hoonah dis one ting, an' den I go. Dat night when Mass Ned war shoot, Mass Charles sen' me yer to dis house for to min' hoonah. An' Mass Charles 'e say, 'Hector,' 'e say, 'dat ar dam Yankee ablishunist officer 'e no 'count. Mebby Miss Bella she want for marry um some day, den you tell Miss Bella, case she marry um, I nebbber speak to she no mo'.' Dem berry word 'e say. Now hoonah kin, do wot hoonah like. Ole Hector done talk." And shaking his head, he walked solemnly and sulkily out of the room.

* Used.



CHAPTER XVI.

"Mount! mount! and to the road, my men,
Right southward is the way;
We'll follow to their farthest den
The robbers and their prey."

EARLY the next morning Robert and Hector, each with a sack of corn on his shoulder, started on their way across lots to the "out pasture," as a field remote from the house was called, to give the horses kept there their daily feed of grain.

"Hector," said Robert, as they went along, "you haven't told me yet what price I ought to ask for Major. If I sell him, now is as good a time as any; but I don't know that I could bear to part with him, even if any body should offer me five hundred dollars."

"Fibe hundred dollar!" exclaimed Hector, contemptuously. "Well, I's ready now for talk. Dat hoss he go in two-tirty-fibe tree time las' week. Wid a good weicle he kin go in two-tirty, dat's for sure. Hoonah no kin sell um for any shish price as a jockey kin, wot know how for cheat properly. But if dat ar hoss dunno fotch tree thousand dollar, don' sell um, dat's all—don' sell um."

"Three thousand dollars! Hector, you don't say three thousand dollars?"

"Tree tousand dollar; does you yeddy?"

Robert let his sack of corn slip to the ground, and, feeling his knees grow weak, sat down upon it.

"An' wot will hoonah buy wid de money?" asked the old man, enjoying the astonishment of the one whose good fortune he had just announced, and which he had in some sort himself created.

Robert needed to think before answering. He thought of a tour in Europe. He thought of buying an interest in a steamboat. He thought of studying for the ministry. He thought of putting up a distillery to make oil and unlimited wealth, as they were proposing to do at *Flaming Rock*. But what

ever castle in the air he built, when he looked toward it to see if Bella was there, he only saw her enthroned above it, not within.

"Does you yeddy?" said Hector. "Wot will you do wid dat tree tousand dollar, s'posin' you git um?"

"I think I'll buy a little farm," Robert answered, not caring to expose to ridicule the plans and specifications of his castle-building.

"No, no; don' buy no little farm. Little farm for poor trash. Buy a shop, an' keep it. Wear store close ebry day, an' make you'self look dis zackly like a true an' true gentleman. Den all de ladies come to de shop for buy tings, an' fall in lub wid de good-lookin' shop-keeper. Den" (confidentially) "hoonah kin marry Miss Polly, an' hab big farm. Whah! whah! whah!" And he let his sack fall, and gave his whole body up to laughing, after the manner of his people.

The laughing accomplished, both of them resumed their burdens and approached the pasture fence, over the top of which the horses were already reaching their heads expectantly. Having distributed the corn in the several compartments of a long trough, giving to each just six ears, Hector and Robert both began to look for the three-thousand-dollar animal they had just been talking about.

Major was not there!

He was not in the field. He was gone! The old man was aghast, and the youth was stunned. His just discovered wealth, his long-loved pet, his pride, his hope, his tour in Europe, his steamboat, his oil-distillery, his pulpit, his shop, his castle in the air, had been stolen in the night. There was n

doubt to hang a hope on. Major's well-known hoof-tracks through the gate-way into the road were easily discerned. The gate had been carefully closed on all the other inmates of the pasture, and *he*, the prince of them all, had alone been taken.

On their returning to the house and informing Mr. Damarin of the calamity, a council was held, which came to the conclusion that the thief was one of the famous Cavern County band, who never touched any but blooded animals, which they collected with enterprising research throughout a large portion of the West, and after secreting them till pursuit blew over, ran them off over the mountains to the New York market.

"And if one of them Cavern County boys is got the colt," remarked the Kentucky member of the council, with a feeling of State pride natural to Kentuckians, "you'd better not foller him very fur over the county line, or you'll never get back yourself."

"Dick is right," said Mr. Damarin; "if you go where you have to fight the gang, the odds will be against you. How far would it be safe to follow the trail, Dick? You have been all over that country, I believe."

"It's ten chances to one," said Dick, "that the gentleman that's taken the colt won't leave the river till he comes to a little road over the hill that takes up just back of the first log-house you come to after you pass Ledberry's Landing, and leads into the county road by one of the forks of Broken Jug Creek. If Bob kin get thar first—that is to say, if he kin get to go a piece on the county road afore the other gentleman turns into it, and find a good ambush, I reckon the colt may be captured with a surprise. That's the only chance I kin see, and I don't think much of *hit*."

Here the whistle of the packet sounded from down river.

"There's the boat coming!" exclaimed Mr. Damarin. "Has any thing passed up during the night?" Nobody had heard any thing except tow-boats. "Then, Robert, suppose you go right aboard the packet and get off at Ledberry's Landing. Since you tell me the hoof-prints were made after the white frost came, I'm sure the thief hasn't got more than *two hours the start of you*."

"But," interrupted the general, "two hours on Major's back are equal to four on a common horse."

"Don't you see? A thief that runs off a horse by daylight dare not ride at full speed, and must double about too. That fellow has crossed the river, or will cross it, back and forth several times between this and Ledberry's. Robert, if you want to pursue your property, take any of the horses you choose, and follow which course you choose; but I would advise you to go by the boat, and she will be here in ten minutes. I beg you will be cautious, my boy. Is any body going with you? Don't you want to go along, Dick?"

But Dick had left Kentucky for reasons which still remained valid and good in law, and pleaded rheumatism. Old Hector, however, volunteered. "Somebody must go," he said, "to fetch back Misser Robert, case him mout go too fur." And Hector also was provided with a good mount.

While the horses were being saddled, Polly drew near to her father with, "Father, it isn't safe, you know it isn't, for Robert to go among those dreadful people. Do—don't let him go; please don't."

"He must judge for himself, my dear. The poor fellow has his all at stake. That colt is worth a small farm; and if he's the man I take him to be, he won't give it up without a chase. I have a good deal of confidence in Hector's prudence. What a true friend that old ducky is, eh?"

Polly, in a most embarrassing distress, which dared not declare itself, next went and expostulated with Robert. But he was desperate. "If I don't come back with that colt under me, Miss Polly," he said, "I don't want to come back at all."

The general offered Robert a revolver and ammunition, but he declined, saying he would rather be shot than shoot. Hector took them, however, remarking that he would "heap rudder shoot dan be shot." At the last moment, before they went on the boat, Polly came running down the bank with the saddle-bags, which she had taken from where they hung over Robert's bed, and filled to their utmost capacity with provisions for the journey. After thanking her for her kind providence, and attaching the

bags to his saddle, the first thing Robert did was to ascertain that the miniature had received no hurt from having the half of a boiled ham thrust down upon it.

About three hours later the pursuers were put off at Ledberry's Landing, which was twenty-five miles above Stone House, and in one minute more were galloping with all possible speed on the county road, which led away from the river and toward the hills in a southeasterly direction. Hector was the better mounted of the two, which was fortunate, for otherwise he would have been left behind by his hotly impatient companion, who had been suffering perfect torment from the delays of the boat in making her half-dozen stoppages on the way up, and now whipped his horse furiously. In about three miles from the landing they came to where a bridle-path intersected the road, coming in on the left, and each leaped from his horse to examine the ground, and each immediately recognized the hoof-prints of poor Major.

"Too late, Misser Robert," said Hector. "Less go back."

"Go back if you want to, Hector; but I am going forward."

"Now, now, look yer, Misser Robert; way's de use! Major got de start o' we, an' sure's de Lord we nebber cotch um."

"We can catch him," cried Robert, already in the saddle, and trying to clear his bridle from Hector's double grip. "Before he got as far as this Major must have gone thirty miles, and that without any corn, while our horses haven't gone three. Then those tracks are as fresh as if made only a minute ago. Let go, I say!" And off he dashed, followed by the other, who found it hard work to overtake him. For two hours more they continued to press their steeds without either one saying a word to the other, though the negro would now and then mutter somewhat to himself in his Carolina *patois*. At the end of that time he recommended his companion to unbuckle one of the bags and eat "some o' Miss Polly's grub." "De Lord bless de sweet chile!" he added, as Robert, though far from being hungry himself, recognized in the request a suggestion that his companion was, and handed him a liberal supply, which he managed to eat while his horse galloped.

Up to this time but three travelers had been encountered; and though each of these was accosted and inquired of, from neither of them was any information obtained. One had been passed by a horseman going at a rapid trot, but the horse was a bay, and not a sorrel. Another had lately come into the road, and had seen nobody at all. The third, who had traveled a long distance at a slow rate, had met and been passed by so many, he could not recollect whether he had seen any thing answering to the description of Major or not. This one remarked that "them horse-thief gentlemen are sharp enough to dodge out of the way of folks they want to avoid; and that's right easy done in a woody country like this yer."

When Hector had entirely finished his dinner, in eating which he had fallen behind his companion to enjoy a decorous privacy, he wiped his mouth and cheeks, and recovered his place in the front. Then he began to look about him. The steep, rough hills among which they had entered soon after leaving Ledberry's Landing had gradually softened into others of more gentle ascent, and the clearings, no longer confined to the narrow creek bottoms, were scattered over slopes and summits as well. The road mounted and descended with an easier grade, and farms of considerable extent came into view. Having observed well the landmarks, the old man turned his attention to the features of Robert, to observe how far the long, hard ride had tempered him down to bear a serious expostulation; for the time had come for his friend to make a resolute effort to arrest the dangerous pursuit. Taking advantage of a long ascent which compelled them to walk the horses, he began by calling attention to their fatigued condition, then to the lateness of the hour (though it was not much past noon), then to the badness of the road (though it was really a good deal better than it had been). Finally, turning and looking Robert in the face, he abruptly asked, "Wha' for hoonah no shoot?"

"Because I will not shed blood—because I'm a Christian, and keep the commandments; and one of them forbids me to kill."

"Bless my eye! wot a difference dey is in people! When we git ober dis yer hill, I

shows you a house 'bout tree mile furrer* on, way dey's an ole lady lib wot got seben children, an' dey's all ob 'em boys. Dey's from twenty year ole up to forty, and ebry one on 'em heap rudder shoot dan not. Nary one less dan six foot tree inch high, and when dey shoot, dey shoot to kill."

"Why, how came you to know that?" inquired Robert, astonished. "Have you ever been here before?"

"Oh yes; yer's way I jine Mass Ned an' Mass Charles arter we was 'blige for to retreat 'cross de riber. Mass Ned 'e ben sick tree week in de house I show hoonah presently. Berry nice ole lady lib dey; berry kin' to we."

As this was said the top of the hill was attained, and Hector, dismounting quickly, and taking the rein of Robert's horse in a careless way, but with a firm grasp, pointed forward into the long, wide valley upon which the view opened, saying, "Dey's de house, dat frame one wid chimney on bote end; dey's way she lib wid she seben boy; dis 'bout tree mile from yer."

The building thus pointed out appeared to be a respectable farm-house, well painted and in good repair, as were all the out-buildings and fences. It was situated on the right side of the road and of the valley, and at the foot of a hill. Across the road from it flowed a stream, which at that place was always too deep to ford, and was of considerable width. On the hither side of the house was a large barn and stable, the stable being between the barn and hill, and its lower story being of stone, and half sunk into the hill-side, from which there projected a massive white ledge of rock that almost overhung the building.

"Well, well," says Robert, "what do I care for the old woman and her house! I must be moving." And he made an effort to do so. But Hector, without relaxing his hold on the bridle, approached nearer to the young man's side, and embraced one of his knees with the arm that was free, while, with an imploring look, he said, "Don' go no furrer, honey; don' go one step furrer, for Gorra mighty sake! Please God, you nebber come back. Dey shoot you for true

—dey dat will. Less go home, honey; less go right 'way dis minute. De colt he gone for sure—leff um go; Miss Polly lub hoonah all de same. She tell me so befo' we come 'way—dat's de God's trute. An' she beg me for min' hoonah well, an' bring hoonah back safe to she, an' she lub me too, long's she lib and breave. Oh, less go, honey; less go!"

All this was uttered with a force of manner which, more than the words themselves, served to restrain Robert from acting on his impulse to forcibly free himself, and push on in the pursuit. It was while thus submitting to a parley, and while Hector was improving the opportunity by telling more of what he knew concerning the nice old lady and her interesting family, that a stranger, emerging from a wooded point of the hill on the right, appeared suddenly in the road before them. He saluted them politely, for he was a courteous man, that stranger, and a pleasant person to meet by the way. He was well mounted, well dressed, and, it may be added, well armed, for across his back was slung a tidy little cavalry carbine. His entire suit of clothes was of blue homespun jean. His linen was clean, his boots polished, and his military felt hat was pinched to the proper shape, and worn in the best style. His face was clean shaved, showing a peculiarly handsome mouth and chin; but when the handsome mouth closed, it closed firmly, and the handsome chin was backed by bull-dog jaws, broad as George Washington's. His rather florid complexion was as fair as the climate would permit. His brown hair was slightly touched with gray, and so was the blue of his eyes, just sufficiently to redeem them from effeminacy.

"Can you tell me, Sir," inquired Robert, after returning the "Good-day, Sir," of the stranger, "if you have met a person riding a young chestnut-sorrel with a star on his forehead?"

The stranger stopped, and, fixing a serious eye on Robert, whom he surveyed from head to foot, answered, "Yes, Sir. I have met such a horse, and that within half an hour, as I should reckon. He was ridden, too, by a person of the most dangerous character. Have you lost such an animal?"

"Let go of my horse's head, Hector!" cried Robert, forgetting his church membership

* Further.

and cursing. But the stranger placed his horse squarely across the road, and compelled the backslider to listen to what he had to say.

"Are you well armed, young gentleman?" he asked.

"I'm not armed at all; I don't believe in shooting; but I'm going after my horse, I don't care who's got him."

"Don't believe in shooting! Then you are in the very country and on the very road to get converted from that belief. My friend, let me advise you to return to your quiet home, and not think of invading Cavern County with less than a dozen resolute men, and they well armed. You are in a dangerous country, and come on a particularly dangerous business. The chief occupation of many of the people, about here especially, is raising horses off of other people's farms, and they don't like to be disturbed in their occupation. I know it is, strictly speaking, against law; but when public opinion is one way and law the other way, public opinion is pretty sure to prevail, you are aware."

"If you know where I would be likely to find my horse, in case I had friends to help me take him, please do tell me, Sir," implored Robert.

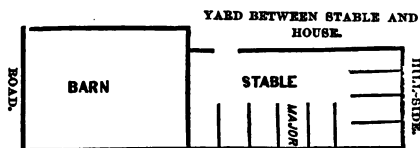
"I presume I hazard little in saying I do," replied the stranger, pointing toward the farm-house that has been mentioned, and which just then a gleam of sunshine from between gathering clouds revealed pleasantly reposing at the foot of the hill, seeming the very abode of innocence and rural felicity. "I presume your horse is at this moment in the stable of that house."

Here Hector vociferously seconded all the stranger had said; and Robert, seeming to yield, turned his horse about as if to return the way he came. But no sooner was he well clear of control than he turned again, and rode madly down the road toward the house of danger. Hector followed, quick as he could mount. The stranger remained looking after them, and reflecting. Then he turned back, and mounted the hill by the same way he had just before descended from it, and gaining the road that ran along its wooded ridge, and parallel to that by which the other two were speeding, he put spurs to his horse.

"I should never forgive myself if I didn't," he said, when he turned back.

The stranger was Sheriff Brown.

As has already been told, the stable to which the scene is about to shift was of stone at the end which touched, and was partly built into, the hill; and adjoining it was a barn, which extended to the road, on which it fronted. Robert, who in his reckless down-hill ride had far outstripped Hector, drew up in front of the barn door, which communicated with the road, where he was concealed from the sight of any one in the house. Leaping to the ground, he tried to open the door, hoping in that way to pass unobserved into the stable beyond it; but it was securely closed. Listening a moment, he heard the munching of a horse feeding on corn, and then a neigh, which was beyond doubt the voice of his own Major recognizing his approach. A survey made through cracks in the two buildings showed the plan of the barn and stable to be as will appear from this diagram.



The siding of the stable on the side next the yard had openings one and two inches wide, from shrinking of the planks. The end next the hill, though built of stone, as has been said, was for some reason tightly boarded with heavy oak planks on the inside.

Robert's first thought was to go in and lead Major out by the halter, without shifting the saddle and bridle until a place of safety could be reached, but the appearance of the horse he had been riding showed him to be on the verge of giving out. His nostrils were blood-red, and his quick panting and distressed eyes told he might drop dead any minute. So Robert quickly stripped him of saddle and bridle, and with the one on his shoulder and the other in his hand, moved round by that side of the building furthest from the house, and climbed in by the stable window. In one of the stalls on the side of the stable, namely, the second one from the window, was the object of his pursuit, up to whose side he stole and flung on the saddle



"WHILE OUT OF THE SAME DARKNESS EMERGED A TALL MAN."

as dextrously and stealthily as if he himself were a horse-thief. Major was not so quiet, but neighed joyously and loud. Robert thrust an ear of corn into his mouth; but the alarm had been given, and before the saddle-girths could be buckled a quick step was heard in the stable-yard, and a stern voice calling, "Who's there? What do you want?"

So familiar was the voice, it seemed it must be that of a friend, but turning to recognize the friend, Robert saw, through the openings between the boards, a roughly clad, mud-bespattered man approach, pistol in hand. The sight filled the seer with horror. His hair rose, his limbs lost power to move. It was Charles Johnston!

"Clear out, I say, or I'll shoot."

Robert fumbled for the girth-straps, but *his fingers felt nothing and could do nothing.*

He averted his head. His senses left him. A pistol report and the whiz of a bullet recalled him to life. His fingers moved then, and in a trice the girths were buckled. And now for the headstall and bit! But another report comes, and another bullet; and as he turns desperately to face the danger, his assailant is seen changing his position for a better aim, at the same time exclaiming, "Be off with yourself, or the next shot will go through your head!"

A word from Robert then might have saved his life, but he couldn't speak it. The bit was in Major's mouth, and the headstall over his ears, and the speechless but resolute youth was about to spring into the saddle, and, without further buckling, run the gauntlet as best he could; but a third aim was covering a vital part of him, and before he could mount, the hammer a third time fell

—and so did the hand that pulled it; for this time there were two reports heard, and two bullets that flew, the one entering the brain of the would-be murderer, and another speeding at random. The effective bullet came from the direction of the knoll just above the great white limestone ledge that overhung the stable, and might have been fired from a cavalry carbine in the hands of a person who had reached the knoll by a path through the woods that led thither from the ridge road.

The double detonation had barely ceased to resound when a very different noise was heard close at hand—a noise of horses' feet on a hard surface, and of creaking bolts shoved back, and a heavy door moving on its hinges, which called Robert's attention toward one of the stalls at the end of the stable; and there he saw the back of the stall—the entire back, from floor to ceiling, with hay-rack, feed-trough, and all—recede into darkness, while out of the same darkness emerged a tall man carrying a lantern and leading a horse. The sight causing Robert to remain perfectly still, he was not observed by the man, who hurriedly set down the lantern,

dropped the bridle, and strode past and out at the door, exclaiming as he went, "Why, what's all this shooting about?" much in the tone of one who asks the meaning of a dog's barking or a woman's scolding. Other voices were heard, and two other giants came running from the house, one of them with a rifle in his hand. Escape through the stable-yard there was plainly none for Robert. The window by which he had entered was close at his back, but the thought of abandoning his horse did not once occur to him. One refuge there was: the dark apartment still yawned close to where he stood, and into it, quickly as he could safely move, he led his horse, and closing the door, bolted it. But as he went he gave a look toward where the fallen man was, and saw him, partly resting on the ground, partly held up in the arms of old Hector, whose hand was even then moving to close the lids and veil the death-stare of eyes that still glared with the intent of a deadly aim; that faithful hand was there to fulfill the last request of the unhappy castaway on that black night when they separated on the frozen shore of the Ohio.





CHAPTER XVII.

"Fly where you will, there's peril every where;
Death walketh through the door that will not ope.
Fall where you may—in pit, or den, or lair—
There Mercy is, and with her liveth Hope."



As soon as he had shoved the bolts to place, Robert glanced round to discern what kind of refuge he had found; but the few beams of light that made their way through the chinks of the great door merely served to show the floor and sides of the place to be of stone, and that the darkness prevailing back of him was very black indeed. He put an ear to one of the chinks and listened. There was loud and excited talking outside, then a movement from the yard toward the stable, then sounds of feet on the floor. "They will be sure to break in here," thought Robert; "God help me if they do!" and he began to move backward.

"Fire!" a voice shouts; "that rack's a-fire! Fetch water every one of you. Drop him, damn you, and come and help us!"

The horse, left loose in the stable, had overturned and broken the lantern, incautiously set down without being extinguished, and from it the rubbish of hay on the floor had caught fire. And the hellish element was

added to complicate the already complex circumstances. Robert, thus unexpectedly saved, though with a most questionable salvation, returned to his chink and resumed his listening.

He heard the unavailing splashing of water by the bucketful, which the fire only drank up with a hiss, then went on flaming, roaring, and crackling with increasing noise till all other sounds were silenced, while the heat at the listening-place was fast getting unbearable. Still he remained, sweltering and almost stifling, until there fell, thundering and crashing against the door, a mass of burning timbers, which continuing to burn, fiery holes soon appeared in many of the planks, through which heat and smoke streamed in, driving him backward step by step. But however far he retreated, or however far the glare from the blazing door penetrated, there were still space and darkness and roaring echoes beyond.

The horse, who had been gradually becoming unmanageable with all his master's efforts to soothe and control him, now broke away and dashed right toward the flames; but just as he did so, the door, with all the burning pile that was pressing upon it, fell forward into the cave, flinging blazing fragments, red coals, and flashing sparks up to Robert's very feet. This was too much for even brutal madness to brave. Major recoiled, stood with feet braced forward and body shrinking back, trembling and snorting at the horror that confronted him, then turned and fled to the rear, where he circled about at full speed for a while, then was heard no more, poor beast!

When the door fell, a current of heat and cloud of smoke came rushing in, while the cool, pure atmosphere they displaced poured out to feed the burning. At first the smoke mounted to the ceiling, but cooling before long against the cold stone surface, descended with suffocating power upon the victim, who, helpless and hopeless, awaited the end. All he could do he did, which was to retire to the extreme limit of the walls and crouch lower and lower to breathe of the stratum of pure air that yet remained near the floor, while the smoke descended lower and lower, and the supply of air grew more scant each minute. Finally he prostrated himself on the floor, with his mouth close down to it, breathing as best he could, praying that it might soon be over with him, while his eyes fixed themselves upon the yawning mouth of fire that roared at him, that darted long tongues of flame at him, that exhaled black, poisonous breath to destroy him, until, through the thickening blackness, only a blood-red spot could be seen. At the last moment his thoughts divided themselves between Bella Johnston, whom he would never see again, and the preaching of the Rev. Mr. Adamsfall, whose descriptions of a subterranean place of torment had converted him and Polly, but which description he could not but think—for who can help his thoughts in such a moment!—had given but a faint idea of the reality of the hell he was even then experiencing.

Another deliverance for the doomed, another reprieve for Robert Hagan! A heavy something fell. The rock on which he lay shook beneath him; a loud, dull noise thundered through the cave. The blood-red spot was gone, and the darkness of the grave was come. The stone wall of the stable had fallen in, and with it a great mass of earth from the hill against which it was built, and stone and earth together completely sealed up the door-way. Robert was safe—and buried alive!

From that moment the air of the cave gradually improved, as the smoke condensed and the heat expended itself against the rocky sides and roof. Soon as he could support the fumes in an erect posture, Robert undertook a thorough exploration of the *mysterious place*. With a still blazing frag-

ment of the fallen door for a torch, he began to make a circuit of the irregular wall, which he found to recede in many places into alcoves more or less deep, and sometimes into considerable chambers. From one of these last, as he neared it, came the voice of his horse, recognizing his approach; but the animal did not trot up for a caress, and between his short whinnies the munching of corn could be heard. He was found standing at a well-filled bin, close to which were a number of rudely built stalls and other evidences that the place was habitually used for secreting stolen horses. Soon as this became clear to him, Robert felt sure there must be water near, and looking further, he found a spring of it delightfully pure and cold, where he drank his fill. The consuming thirst being quenched, appetite manifested itself; so, after releasing Major from the embarrassment of the bit, and tying him at a trough supplied with a proper allowance of the grain, he for himself had recourse to the store in the saddle-bags, and blessed Polly while he ate.

After eating he rekindled the torch and resumed his exploration. No sign of an outlet could be found, and when he considered how utterly dark the place was, and how slowly the smoke was disappearing, he became convinced no way of exit existed, save the one by which he had entered. Returning to that, then, he found it completely blocked with a mingled heap of stone, earth, and timber, all of it hot and fuming. Hours yet must elapse before it would be possible to do any thing, for his supply of water was quite inadequate to cool the great mass to be worked upon, and all that could be spared of it was used to extinguish the still burning fragments of the door which lay scattered about. Before doing this, however, he built a small fire in a corner quite out of view from the door-way, and collected and piled near it fragments enough to feed it for several days, if need should be.

He had been so fortunate, while making his exploration near the stalls, as to find a shovel, and by wrenching apart one of the racks, had provided himself with a stout hickory handspike. Thus furnished, he was confident of being able to dig through the barrier that entombed him as soon as

should grow cool enough, and if he could manage to work without being detected.

By this time it might be night-fall or midnight, for all the buried man knew. Certainly no sound could be heard coming from without. If any sleep were to be indulged in, then was the time; and so, returning to where he had left Major, he gave him water and filled his rack, then lay down on a pile of hay, and enjoyed rest and oblivion until Major woke him by calling for corn, by which he knew it must be about seven o'clock in the morning.

He found the obstructing heap through which he must dig had become cool enough to be worked, and was not long in beginning. He labored regardless of the lapse of time, and not until his fellow-prisoner had thrice summoned him, and he had thrice gone and attended to his wants, did it occur to Robert that something must be done to secure the animal's absolute silence. After that he kept the rack constantly replenished, and the water-bucket as well.

He frequently stopped as he worked to listen for outside sounds, and when at length he heard, or thought he heard, faint noises, he worked gently enough to make sure of not giving an alarm. At length voices, though not words, could unmistakably be heard, and then he stopped entirely. He discovered, too, by the jarring of a large

beam whose end projected through the other rubbish into the cave, that the sounds came from persons engaged, like himself, in clearing away the obstructions. If they should get through before night-fall? But those outside did not work very diligently, and before long every thing became quiet. Then renewing his labors, cautiously at first and with frequently stopping to listen, afterward boldly and more efficiently, he succeeded after a few hours in bringing down so large a portion of the embankment that an opening was made at the top, through which so much of light as a dark and stormy night could shed streamed in, and with it cool gusts of air and heavy rain-drops, almost as delicious to the gasping worker as that liberty of which they were the harbingers.

The hole thus made was large enough for Robert's escape, but not for Major's, and the tired hands must still toil on, watching, listening, and praying the while; but work and pray as he might, the storm was ceasing, the cock was crowing, when Major scrambled through upon his belly as no less intelligent horse could have been made to do, and picked his way over the blackened ruins. And now welcome dawn and welcome day, and welcome sun-bright skies! Let any cock crow that will; let any thief follow who may! The road is for Major and his rider!





CHAPTER XVIII.

“Still the cloud un pitying lowers;
Still its bolts unerring fall;
All my temples, all my bowers
Broken, shattered, ruined, all.”

AT about the time when Robert was mounting his horse beside the ruins of the burned building, a skiff that had crossed the river from Stone House grounded on the Kentucky shore. The oarsman stepped to land, pulled the bow of the boat well up on the beach, flung still further the stone that served for an anchor, and then stood as if waiting for the person who sat in the stern to move. After waiting for a few moments in vain, he said, “We’s yer, missis.”

Bella had been looking back to where, in the gray light and stillness of early morning, the house that had so long been her shelter and home seemed alumbering amidst its trees and shrubbery, as its inmates were in their beds, none of them dreaming of her departure. At the summons of Hector she started, turned her head, then rose, and with his aid stepped out. Her eyes were dry of tears, but red and hot as from a night of weeping, and her cheeks, though burning, were haggard. She walked rather quickly directly up the bank, and on reaching the river road, turned to the eastward. Her companion waited only to take from the boat a bundle of considerable size, which he swung over his shoulder by means of a hickory quarter-staff, and then followed her.

Both of them walked on in silence, except that from time to time the old man would call out to beg his impatient young companion not to go so fast. At the end of seven or eight miles Bella stopped where a more traveled road than the one they were following branched off to the south, and waited for Hector to come up.

“Which way?” she asked.

“Dat way,” he answered; “I tink ’e lead right trough Clarksburg an’ Cumberland Gap. I knows de oder way better; dat go up Big Sandy; but I spec dat too rough for hoonah.” He said this while seated on his bundle and wiping his forehead. He was evidently greatly fatigued, but for some reason appeared to wish to conceal that he was so.

“Why, my poor Hector!” she exclaimed, when at length she did notice his condition; “you are tired already. Is it because I have made you walk too fast, or because that bundle is so heavy? Why, good gracious, what a heavy load you’ve been carrying!” she exclaimed, as she lifted it with both hands. “What is in it?”

“Dis a few close an’ some prowision,” he replied, trying to keep the pack from being opened. But Bella insisted, and found the contents to be a very few clothes and a great many provisions, namely, two sides of bacon, four chickens plucked and cleaned, a basket of boiled eggs, a sack of corn flour, some coffee and sugar, with other things of lesser weight.

“You wretched old man! What have you done?” she cried.

“Dey owes um all, missis—it’s de Lord’s trute—dey owes um all, ’count o’ lass mont wages,” protested he, “an’ mo’ too. Please God, I nebber steal um.” And while Bella walked away, wringing her hands in vexation that was almost agony, he hastily repacked his plunder, muttering to himself, “S’poe she tink I gwine away empty-handed from de Norrard! No, no, I isn’t no skish deblish fool as dat.” As he was about to

shoulder his bundle again, he looked up the road that Bella had just left, and saw something which relieved him of his embarrassment, and for a time at least diverted his mistress from her chagrin.

"Why, dat's him—dat's dem, sure's de Lord!" he cried, looking and pointing with gesture of delight and surprise toward where, on an eminence, standing still, as if halting to rest, their outline relieved against the bright sky, were Major the horse and Robert his rider. "Oh, de Lord be praise! de Lord be praise for tender mercy and lubbin-kineness! Misser Robert be libbin for true!" And Bella, too, running back to look, thanked God and praised him; then walked rapidly on to meet Robert, who, on his part, as he drew near, found it hard to believe it was Bella he saw in that place at that time, clad in that gray mantle, with only its hood for head-covering, though she greeted him with extended arms and a face beautified with a smile that was almost tender in its solicitude. Coming up to his side, she took one of his hands in both of hers, while the negro, approaching him on the other side, embraced his knee.

"And you are quite well, and free from all harm?" said Bella. "Tank God for dat!" was the response of Hector. Neither of them ventured to express fully what was in their minds, but it was not necessary; Robert understood them.

"Well! Oh yes, miss," he replied; "but dreadfully dirty," he added, as, for the first time, he thought how blackened he must be. Then, sliding down from the saddle, he looked from one to the other with no little embarrassment. "You—you will ride back home on Major, won't you?" he said. "I'll warrant he'll be gentle, for he's come forty miles this morning."

She shook her head. "Stone House is no longer a home for me," she said. "I left it this morning, or last night, rather. I came away by stealth, Robert, because—because I could not part from them in any other way; and, besides, I feared they might oppose my coming. It is this I want you to explain to them, Robert—and you will do so, will you not? You will tell them all I say."

"But you surely have not quit Stone House for good? You don't mean that? Why, all

the friends you have on earth are in that house—all except poor me."

"All the friends I have on earth," she repeated—"yes, and none better than they, living or dead. But they are not mine by right; only from benevolence and pity has their friendship sprung, and such as that I will not own. I remained too long in a house where I should not have staid for a day. I now see I was but a trespasser and a beggar there, and I go away as a thief."

"But, Miss Bella! Miss Bella! where will you go, and what will you do? What will become of you? Oh dear! oh dear!" cried Robert, in hopeless distress, as he too clearly saw her will was rising, as a western cloud, flashing with the electric power of her spirit and her pride.

"My destiny concerns myself," answered her spirit and her pride. Then, as if suddenly remembering she had no longer any right to possess either, all signs of them vanished from her manner, leaving only sadness and humility, as she said, "Robert, good Robert, I thank you for all you have done for me—carry also my thanks to the others. Of what I have just been saying, remember only the reasons I gave for having left them in the way I did. Be sure to tell them those reasons; and tell them, also, that I have a well-considered purpose and a firm resolution. Please remember my words." And she repeated them to Robert, who heard, but could make no reply for his tears.

"And say," she continued, "I at last know all I owe to them, however ignorant of it I may formerly have been. I know, too, I can never repay it in any measure. Say I beg of them not to be anxious for my welfare; that I am sure I shall be able to provide for and take care of myself; and that no honest labor, however humble it may be, or however low it may be called, could demean Bella Johnston so much as to have remained a day longer under their roof. You will tell them all this: be sure to tell them."

"Miss Bella, I will not tell them any such thing. You do very wrong to go away. You know very well they all love you as they do each other, and would do any thing in the world rather than lose you. It is cruel in you to act toward them as if they were enemies instead of friends. You talk

as if they had no feeling, and yourself had none either, and had lost your senses besides, and acted only from that bitter, black pride which besets poor sinners, and drags them down to perdition. Oh, Miss Bella, do as you ought to do, and go straight back with me. Think how they are feeling at this very moment; and just for a moment look at this business as you know they do. Oh, go back; do go right back with me—won't you, now?"

"Do not distress me, my good friend. What you say is well said, but words can not change my purpose. Let us say no more, except to bid each other good-by, as old and true friends should. Yes, there is one thing more" (glancing toward the bundle): "can you carry back, on your horse, something Hector has brought away?"

"No," he interrupted, "I am not going back. If your resolution is taken, so is mine. I shall not return to Stone House unless you do. I will attend you on the journey you have undertaken, wherever that may lead. When it comes to an end, you may dismiss me if you will, and I must submit. But you shall never travel on foot over these hills while I own a horse. You can ride on Major, and Hector and I will walk. Am I not right, Hector?"

"Yes, Misser Robert; dis zackly right," said Hector, whose practical mind saw at once how easily Major could carry Bella, and the bundle of provisions too.

"But, Robert, you do not know what a long journey mine will be," expostulated Bella.

"If you are going to your home in the South, it will be a long journey, I know. But that would make it all the more necessary you should not attempt it on foot, and that I should go to help protect you."

Bella's entreaties as well as her commands all failed to shake Robert's purpose. He insisted, despite her threatened anger even, that if not allowed to accompany, he would follow her. And Hector seconding him in the argument, she finally gave way. The heavy bundle was unpacked then, and its contents, after the saddle-bags had been stuffed with all they would hold, were bestowed in two sacks, which were tied together by their necks, and swung upon Ma-

jor's back close in front of the saddle. This last the horse strongly objected to; but he was a reasonable animal, and when the contents of the sacks had been made known and explained to him through sight and smell, he consented. This arrangement supplied in some measure the want of a pommel, so that Bella, when mounted, found her seat very comfortable. And when, finally, all was ready for the start, and the party turned their faces southward, Robert walking at the horse's head and prudently holding by the rein, while Hector, grasping his quarter-staff, trudged along on the opposite side, relieved of all his burden and half his load of care, they all felt, if not cheered, at least invigorated and encouraged by the sensations which ever attend on and bless enterprise, endeavor, progress. They were encompassed besides by the exhilarating morning air, and the sheen of the hoar-frost that every where around reflected the early sunlight, and gave promise more sure than the promise of a rainbow that the day would be fair and the weather kindly. Arrived at Clarksburg, they made no halt, except that, while Robert and Bella kept on their way through the town, Hector stopped long enough to purchase, at one of the shops, a large tin cup and three small ones, a knife and fork, a spoon, and a light frying-pan. Provided with these, when, a few miles further, Bella was persuaded to stop and rest, the old negro cooked as good a traveler's dinner as the hungriest could need, or the most fastidious wish. At the end of the meal the question of resources naturally came up for consideration. All pockets being emptied, the sum total of available funds was found to be about twenty-five dollars. On the way Bella had disclosed, what Robert had already surmised, that the end of her journey would be Waccamaw Neck, near the sea-coast, in South Carolina, and Hector had explained, so far as he could explain and his hearer comprehend, the route and the distances. Considering all this, the means at command seemed small enough, and Hector's forethought in respect to provisions appeared prudent and wise.

When Bella, after being informed by Hector on his return late in the evening of the day before concerning the dreadful terminus

tion of the expedition to recover the stolen horse, took the desperate resolution of abandoning the shelter of Stone House, the question of where she should go, and how, was a secondary consideration. And when she determined to return to her Southern home, it was in desperation she did so, and not in that mood which measures distance or counts cost. Had she been sure of perishing in the mountains, still she would have gone forth. Robert, however, after having obtained permission to be of the party, without the right to ask "whither or how," now felt it his duty to conduct the expedition on more modern principles than those obtaining in times when Don Quixote and Gil Blas made their celebrated journeys

through Spain, which both Bella and he had been so fond of reading about. With money enough this would have been easy enough, but to go by steamer and rail all the way from where they were to Waccamaw would be to make an exceedingly roundabout and expensive journey, for which the means at command would be quite inadequate. Might he communicate with Mr. Damarin, he could easily obtain all the money needed; but this, of course, Bella would not allow. He could, therefore, see no way but for them to go on in the primitive style they had begun with, until the mountains were crossed and a country of railroads reached, and then trust to contrivance and endeavor for the rest.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE place where the travelers stopped was a little way within a ravine that opened to the road, and beside a small "run." While Robert remained seated on the broad, flat stone that had served them for dinner-table and chairs, occupied in counting the green paper money and calculating its purchasing power, and Hector, at a pool further up the run, was washing the frying-pan, cups, knife, fork, and spoon, the horse being still further up, grazing on what he could find, Bella, too impatient to remain long at rest, walked back and forth between the dining-place and the road. As she approached the road, at the end of her course, she caught sight of a horseman coming rapidly from the direction of Clarksburg. She stopped where she was, beneath the closely knit and drooping branches of a great beech, and waited there till he got near enough to be recognized by his form; but the moment her quick eye did recognize that form—herself as yet unseen—she shrunk behind the trunk of the tree while William Damarin rode past, pressing his steed to its utmost. Had she given a second look from her hiding-place, had she seen the expression that distorted his noble features, possibly her journey had ended on the day it began.

Neither of her companions had surmised

who the horseman was that galloped so swiftly over the road, though both of them noticed that she remained a long while crouched at the foot of the beech-tree. At length they went toward her; but when she saw them coming she rose and walked to meet them. "Hector," she said, as they drew near, "did you not tell me you were better acquainted with the route up the Big Sandy than with this one, but that you thought it too rough for me to travel on foot?"

"Yes, Miss Bella."

"But now that, thanks to Robert, I have a good horse to ride, would it not, after all, be better we should go by the way of Sandy? There must be some path by which we can cross over and get into the road that we turned out of this morning without losing very much time. I have just been thinking we should try to do so."

Hector thought the new plan a good one, and Robert said it would be easy enough to go over the hills into the valley of the Kin-niconick; where, by following the course of that stream, they would come into the Greenupsburg road, which was the best and shortest route to the Sandy.

"Then let us set out at once," she exclaimed, with an agitation her companions could

not understand, and with her own hands aided in preparing for the start. Robert, leading Major unmounted, clambered rapidly to the top of the nearest hill, which was a spur of the main ridge; but when they had achieved the steep ascent she was already there, having outstripped both. Hardly would she wait for the horse to breathe before she mounted and was urgent to press on. And yet, while her outward purpose was apparently so fixed, all was doubt and confusion within. She knew not what she really wished, nor what she ought to do. One thing, however, was certain: the pursuit she was by so well-devised and bold a movement escaping from had actually given her a thrill of joy, felt through all her sadness and shame. She wished, or thought she wished, to escape, yet felt it was delightful to be followed.

After going some ten miles the travelers descended into the romantic valley of the river Kinniconick. Among the settlers whom its cheap yet fertile soil, healthy air, and beautiful scenery have tempted there are some persons of more intelligence and refinement than one would look for in so inaccessible a place. The house of one of these, who was agent for the owners of a tract of forty thousand acres of land, was the first dwelling the travelers came to. Though the sun was yet two hours high, Robert insisted on stopping and asking for hospitality—which he did in a peculiar way that left the host at liberty to receive from the guests, when the time for parting should come, either money or thanks, and entitled the guests while they staid to make themselves as much at home as if they expected to pay money.

In the room where they were received Robert was glad to find a large map hanging up, from which and from information the host gave he learned that by going by the route they had chosen about two hundred miles, they would strike a railroad at Abingdon, in Virginia. Two hundred miles on Major's springy back was not too much for Bella to endure; and for himself, Robert, two hundred thousand walked by her side would have been too little.

Mr. Mariner, the host, was making sundry improvements upon the property in his charge, one of which was the planting of

an orchard, in a large field of newly cleared ground. Robert and Hector, strolling about, stopped to observe the progress of the work on this field, which, being too full of roots for deep plowing, the ground had to be prepared for setting out the trees by digging a deep hole for each one, and then filling it again with the same soil which came out, reversed and loosely flung in. The backwoodsmen employed to do this were making but sorry progress, and Mr. Mariner was complaining that not half the orchard would be ready for planting before cold weather. An idea struck Robert. "Hector and I understand something of this kind of work," he said to Mr. Mariner. "If you think you can afford to pay us fifteen cents for every hole we dig, we might stop here a week and finish the job for you."

The bargain was gladly agreed to on the other side. But Bella objected at once to any thing like delay, until, with the aid of the map, Robert explained to her that by remaining where she was while they could earn money enough to pay the railroad fares, she would be able to reach her destination some ten days earlier than if the whole journey were made in their present style of traveling.

To the great surprise of their employer, the two new hands dug, each, three times as many holes as any of the backwoodsmen did, and by the end of the week the job was done and cheerfully paid for, and the travelers went on their way with resources more than doubled.

"I really think you ought to have paid that girl two dollars," said Mrs. Mariner to her husband. "I certainly never saw a woman do as much work by half as she did, nor with half so little clatter or fuss."

The travelers went on their way, and one of them went rejoicing. He well enough knew his portion of that way must come to an end at Abingdon, for he was sure Bella would not consent to his accompanying her beyond there, and the thought of the parting that must come recurred now and then as a lancinating pang; but to say that pang alloyed the delight he felt in being with her would be wrong. For the joy of love is too pure to mix with any thing that can alloy. Pain or sorrow, past or future, only heighten

it by their contrast. Happy in the fullness of the days that were his own, he rejoiced in them as he journeyed, and in all their hours and minutes.

From the beginning to the end of that journey, it should here be mentioned, not a word was spoken concerning Stone House, or its people, or any thing that ever happened there. There were stories told of Smoky Creek and Waccamaw Neck; but the history of the years spent in that mansion by the Ohio remained a closed and sealed volume. Sometimes Bella would sing a hymn—the only music she knew—in a voice that filled the valley. A sweet voice, too, it was—although quite untaught since the time when she was captured—and aided by a charming elocution that was the gift of early breeding and her own good taste. Sometimes not her song, but her laugh, made music for the valley, when the old negro's oddities or humor provoked her mirth. Sometimes she would keep silence for hours, her busy thoughts devising plans for the future. Then, rousing herself from reverie, she would apply herself to entertaining Robert with long stories of what happened in her childhood, with ghost stories too, such as her black nurses used to frighten her with, and even told all the fables she learned from the same source concerning the wise "Bro' Rabbit," the ferocious but simple "Bro' Wolf," and all the other brethren of the fields and the woods whom the African imagination had taught how to discourse in gibberish to excellent moral purpose.

One day, after she had been telling him about her parents' household and the neighbors who used to enjoy the hospitalities of "Multiflora," Robert remarked,

"It seems to me those planters must have been very great and rich folks, just like the lords and ladies the old novels tell about."

"They were all of them rich people," she replied; "how many of them were great depends upon how they now bear the loss of their riches. Those who succumb to pover-

ty can not be said to have ever been great. I have faith, however, that most of the members of our old families will meet adversity with courage and endurance, and through it work their way to prosperity again, as the founders of them worked theirs. The spirit of a gentleman is not easily crushed—no, nor of a gentlewoman either. For one, while I live I will strive, and I think I shall live to plant and reap the fields of my inheritance as prosperously as any of my forefathers did."

"If you only had two or three thousand dollars to begin with," suggested Robert, with a slight quiver in his voice, and with a glance toward Major.

"That being out of the question, I shall begin the earliest moment that I can begin, by doing the thing that is nearest to my hand; and that finished, reach out for the next, trusting in God and my own energies for what may come of it."

Hard was the parting on the platform of the station at Abingdon, and it needed all Bella's tact to avoid an avowal and a scene that it was best should not occur.

"Good-by, my good, dear friend," she said, from the window of the car, as it began slowly to move. "We shall never meet again; but we shall never forget each other, shall we? And, Robert, should any thought, any recollection of the past, remain to give you pain or disturb your peace, pray, for my sake, do as I have done—bury the past; turn your back on it, and look only to the future, where there is always hope for the young, the honest, and the strong. Good-by, dear Robert!"

When Robert removed his gaze from the direction in which the train had disappeared, dancing from earth to heaven in a sea of water that filled his eyes, only one person lingered about the station. Of him he inquired what road he should take to reach Cumberland Gap, and having got the information, mounted his horse, and was soon beyond the limits of the little town.



CHAPTER XX.

OUR story is drifting toward the unequaled rice district of the Waccamaw. Though our country has the honor of producing the best rice in the world, our cooks—except those of the region where it is grown—are too ignorant, too inexact, too careless and unfaithful, to follow the few and easy yet indispensable rules for properly boiling it. Pearl of grains it is, and it is said one-half the inhabitants of the globe make it their daily food—their manna and ambrosia; but they cook it as it should be, those Chinese and Hindoos, and other advanced peoples; they could not live on the tasteless, trashy messes we make of it.

From motives of economy, Bella and Hector left the railroad at Cheraw, on the Great Pedee, and took passage in a corn-boat bound for Georgetown. The second day of the voyage brought their sluggish craft to where the river flowed through swamps famous for being the refuge of Marion's men in the Revolution, and of runaway negroes in later times. It was, indeed, a strange and dismal region, that of the swamps of the Great Pedee. On both sides the river seemed to widen indefinitely far into a dense forest, whose borderings of heavy timber formed the only boundaries of the turbid stream that flowed sluggishly between. When, for the first time after many years, Bella's eye penetrated the dim vistas and chambers of the swamp, though she remembered them well, their gloom appalled her, and well it might, though seen for the hundredth time. As the day drew to a close that gloom deepened into darkness almost impenetrable, and from out the darkness came all the sounds of the night, though early twilight still prevailed elsewhere. The evil-omened whip-poor-will wailed; the night-hawk stooped with *whir of wing*; monstrous frogs,

named "blood-an'-'ounds," from the sounds they utter, called in loud, deep bass for "blood and wounds;" while the alligator, from his floating log, with a human voice, groaned for the wounded and the bleeding. Besides the mournful cypress, tree of the grave, a drapery of crape-like gray moss hung from whatever would hold it, and drooped and trailed in the dark water below. It was as if Nature herself had furnished the funeral, the mourning, and the wailing for desolate and dying Carolina, once proudest of the proud, hottest of the hot, leader of States, and Lucifer of rebellion.

During all of that night Bella remained on the boat's deck, without any thought of sleep. It would have been difficult for the hardiest mind to resist the spells that environed her, as she drifted through that realm of Night and Darkness, on her way toward a clouded destiny. She did not attempt to resist. She submitted. She gave herself up to grief, and grieved passionately. A sense of her bereavements oppressed her as it never had before. Father, mother, and brothers, all had died and been buried, without her being permitted to attend either of them dying or follow either to the grave. They seemed now to come and demand their dues of mourning; and to the accomplishment of that mourning she consecrated her long vigil, during all the hours of which her tears sparkled up to the stars, then fell to mingle and be lost in the ever-flowing river.

Mile followed mile of the dismal progress, hour followed hour of the dismal night, and still the course was down a shoreless stream, and still from the bordering chaos came the voices of discord speaking oracles of despair, sole greeting for the young orphan's return

to her home. The night-hawk stooped upon his prey; the whip-poor-will called for scourgings and stripes; the frog demanded more blood and more wounds; and the alligator continually groaned. But the ordeal came to an end, and so did the night and the Great Pedee River, when Winyaw Bay was reached. And the first glories of sunrise came with a more fitting welcome to embodied youth, health, beauty, innocence, courage, and hope.

After crossing the bay the boat was made fast at one of the wharves of the ancient port of Georgetown, once the second city of the State, but now the most decayed, orphaned, widowed, and altogether bereaved village to be found in America. There Hector was fortunate enough to secure places in a six-oared canoe belonging to a plantation high up on the Waccamaw, and about to start on its return. As it had been impossible for Bella to resist the gloomy influences of the night voyage through the swamp, so was it impossible to resist the enlivening ones which prevailed on her daylight trip in that six-oared canoe, with its crew of merry black men. Negro Congressmen we have, and Senators too; and if we will, we can crown the edifice of freedom with a President of bronze—we will, if we choose—but nowhere, not in Congress-hall or Senate-chamber, cabinet council or executive throne, will the African race appear to so good advantage as where a negro boat's crew, lustily pulling, keep stroke to songs of their own originating, or laugh at their own jokes and humor. The music and jokes that beguiled Bella of her sadness were in themselves quite unfit to bear criticism: the power they exerted lay in the feeling that was in the tones, and the pure glee that was in the laughter. Then the songs were the same she had loved to hear when she was a child and at home, which alone was enough to make her love to hear them now. Well did she recognize the plaintive air beginning,

"I wish I ben yeddy w'a' ma-a-my say—
W'a' ma-a-my say—w'a' ma-a-my say;"

and this rousing one, adapted to quick stroke:

"O wake jaw-bone! 'e walk an' talk;
O wake jaw-bone! 'e tell no lie."

Here is one, however, which she did not remember to have heard:

"Two dog was fightin' one anudder;
Dey fight to kill, for dey was brudder.

Chorus.

By the Crew: Steer um straight.

By the Steersman: Pull um strong.

By All: Row de boat an' sing de song.

"On de ground de 'possum lay,
An' he was playin' 'possum play.—*Chorus.*

"'E lie dat still 'e nebber stir;
'E know'd it's him dey's fightin' fur.—*Chorus.*

"'E nebber bark; 'e nebber bite;
'E let dem dog do all de fight.—*Chorus.*

"Dey fight all night; dey fight all day;
But like de dead dat 'possum lay.—*Chorus.*

"Dey bite an' scratch, an' do dat same
Till one go dead an' t'oder lame.—*Chorus.*

"Den 'possum, dat dey tought to fry,
Jump up an' open bote him eye.—*Chorus.*

"Now 'possum safe an' libe an' free,
'E sing de song ob jubilee.—*Chorus.*

"'E dance an' play de tambourine;
'E lick de 'lasses an' de cream.—*Chorus.*

"Swing de sword an' beat de drum:
Glory, Lord, for kingdom come!"—*Chorus.*

It was after noon when the boat stopped at the mouth of the canal which traversed the rice fields of the Johnston estate in the direction of the neck of rising ground that lay between the fields and the sea-shore beyond, on the crown of which rising ground the mansion had been built. There was a mile to be walked on the bank of the canal before the avenue of live-oaks would be reached which led up to the house, and was itself half a mile long. On the way an opportunity was afforded to examine the condition of the estate. Evidently it had not been cultivated at all during the last few years; and Hector pronounced the ditches, banks, and "trunks" to be decayed and injured to such an extent that to repair them would cost a "heap o' money." "An' we no got no money, missis," he added. "Now we's yer, de Lord know wot we's gwine for do."

"You are right, Hector," said Bella, to whom the want of money was not a new idea. "And He it is will tell us what to do. We have come all the way here, my friend, on purpose to ask Him."



"O MY GOD, WHAT SHALL I DO?"

y approached the further end of the rank wild growths of various kinds and interlaced across the path, retrogress so difficult that Hector had advance and break the way. At the entrance to the avenue was reaching under its high-roofed overhanging, Bella looked toward the opposite side saw two chimneys standing, and all! Without word or cry, she moved forward to the gate of the garden, open, and entered. The garden was a paradise once: it had become a waste and a field of thorns. Arrived at the door of the house, she found a heap of stones at either end of which a brick column and a head-stone and foot-stone marking the site of a once living home. She knelt upon that grave, and, with her hands and writhing brow, there uttered

her question and her prayer: "O my God, what shall I do?"

Hector groaned, then stood silently apart.

When Bella rose up from the ashes and looked about, she found herself surrounded, at a respectful distance, by the negroes, who had gathered there from their quarters on hearing the swiftly flying news that the young missis they had thought to be dead was alive, and had returned to them. As soon as they felt permitted to speak they overwhelmed her with greeting and blessing, manifold and vociferous, hearty and loving. Those of them, especially, who had been house servants, and known, handled, and loved in her infancy the idol of the house, seemed ready to worship her now as a full-grown divinity. The feeling of such for such an object is but little understood. It can hardly be explained. But it is beautiful.

tiful, though, and is, or rather it *was*, of redeeming power over many things needing redemption.

They put their all at her disposal; they offered to work for her, to obey her; they pressed near and kissed her hands; they kissed her mantle. Some of them knelt and embraced her knees; some on their knees prayed for her; some laughed for joy that she had come back to them at last; some wept that she had come to a desolation.

In greeting them all and making inquiries concerning their welfare, in receiving accounts of the dead and absent, in being presented with the numerous children, half of them wholly naked, that had come into life since she was last there, and in going through the quarters to visit the bedridden and crippled, Bella, for the time, forgot both herself and her circumstances. She was recalled, however, when one of the women, Psyche, her mother's seamstress, suddenly remarked, "Why, missis, dey was a gentleman yer t'oder day 'quirin' for you—a young mossa, and handsome, and a true and true gentleman."

"Him wasn't no gentleman, nudder," interrupted one of the men. "Him was a Yankee."

"No Yankee 'tall," added a third. "'E come from Kentucky, way all de hogs grows. Dey's as good gentlemen grows in Kentucky as dey does in dis yer country."

By much questioning Bella was able to learn that a person, whom from the description given she knew must be William Damarin, had come to Multiflora in search of her, and remained several days in the neighborhood, during which time he had visited all the plantations near, and that he had taken his departure on the steamboat for Charleston only three days before her arrival. To this information a good deal more was added by numerous, conflicting, and disputatious informants, which, however, she did not heed, as she walked back and

forth absorbed in thought. Presently, looking toward Psyche, she asked:

"Is the house at the sea-shore in?"

"Yes, missis," was the reply.

"Is any body there?"

"Yes, missis—Westa; she stay dere since mossa him go 'way. She no will 'way. Last year de stable him wash in a 'big gale, an' de year befo' de ser hall him go too. I spec de house hi next, an' Westa wid it."

"Hector! Hector!" Bella called.

Hector came.

"We will go to the sea-shore," she said.

"Better go right 'way dis minute, it fo' mile to walk, an' de sun no high."

But before Bella could get away from crowd of votaries she had to accept numerous offerings. They brought chickens, ducks, eggs, persimmons, stew of dried herbs, sweet-potatoes, ground (pea-nuts), rice, corn meal—in short, of the poor, generous creatures gave something, and, after the manner all had strictly taught from their infancy, thanked her for accepting it.

The gifts would have loaded a pack-train but as there was no mule at hand, they distributed in panniers, piggins, and bashes, and "toted" on the heads of younger members of the community, volunteered in mass for the expedition were so numerous that the burdens all to most of them were ridiculously small. The procession that followed Bella, finally she set out, was headed by Al, the son of Diana, a youth of twenty, steadied his powerful frame beneath a bash holding a dozen of eggs, and was crowned with a big-bellied little Atlas, who balanced on his head, without once putting his foot to it, a live "cooter" (terrapin), resting tom upward, and ineffectually sprawling pawing the air.



CHAPTER XXI.

THE neck of land lying between the Waccamaw River on the west and the ocean on the east is fringed on the side of the latter by a series of narrow sandy islands, which are hardly more than reefs flung up from the sea. Narrow lagoons, called "backwater," separate them from the mainland, and inlets from the sea into the backwater divide them from each other. Where the surface of these islands is not occupied by swamps and thickets it shows barren tracts of almost milk-white sand, dry and easily drifting into hills of considerable size, that shift almost daily, on which no herbage can grow, except now and then a few spears of coarse, worthless grass. Here and there among the hills are level spaces on which are seen small groups of palmetto bushes, with an occasional palmetto-tree or live-oak, and patches of coarse rushes or finer grass, equally valueless unless for basket-work.

The more desert portions are, for the very reason that they are desert, and therefore healthy, chosen for places of summer residence by planters of the Waccamaw. After the season of autumnal storms begins, however, such places are considerably more dangerous than the slopes of Vesuvius. Strong easterly gales, coinciding with high tides, sometimes cause the ocean to break entirely over an island, the great waves beating down the apparently strong rampart of hills, and converting into quicksand the ground beneath the houses, which sink in it, or are overturned and flooded away. For this reason the buildings are substantial, but are also rude to a remarkable degree, considering the wealth of their occupants; and for the same reason they are usually stripped of their furniture at the end of every season, and left quite tenant-

less during the remainder of the year, though sometimes an old slave of solitary tastes is left in charge. There are no roads nor fences. Each structure is founded on wooden columns that go deep enough into the sand to penetrate the moist and permanent under-stratum, and rise high enough to be safe from ordinary drifts.

Some of the houses are painted, some are plastered, some have glass windows, and some have chimneys; but the case is exceptional where all these superfluities are united in one dwelling. In the Johnston house they were not; it had the windows and a chimney, but the inside was merely ceiled with unpainted and unvarnished cypress, and the outside only whitewashed.

Aunt Vesta, who during four years had been the only inhabitant and keeper of the place, was an anomalous being in this, that she was a negro and an old maid. And having lived sixty years in a world full of men without being induced to change her condition, or even modify it—as was commonly reported and believed—the chances were she would always continue to be unapproachable and irreproachable. She was the sister of Hector, and born, like him, within the limits of the "yard," was proud of her birth, and had always been treated as a confidential member of the family. Before laws were made against teaching the blacks to read or write, Vesta had acquired for herself a tolerable education, and during two or three summers of travel in the Northern States with her mistress had obtained some tolerably wide views and pretty high notions. Though utterly black, she was very handsome. Her form was slender and erect. She spoke perfectly good English, and few ladies in the State could excel her in manner and deportment.

But Vesta was peculiar. She did not go to church, nor attend camp-meeting. Though given to reading, she was never known to look into a Bible or prayer-book. Nor could all Mrs. Johnston's persuasions induce her to do so, though she was careful and adroit in avoiding to explain her reasons. She never showed any dislike to her own race, yet seemed to hold herself superior to all the blacks about her; and they in turn seemed willing to admit her superiority, and seldom intruded upon her except when they came as to an acknowledged superior to ask of her counsel or aid. They evidently attributed to her supernatural power and knowledge. Her grandmother, a native African, who claimed to be the daughter of a king, and had always been revered and feared as a priestess and sorceress, had instructed Vesta, it was said, in all the mysteries of African fetichism, a religion the roots of which still lie deep in the hearts of those of African origin dwelling in the secluded and carefully darkened lower portion of South Carolina—a State whose laws excluded not alone negroes coming from other States, but even prevented, with heavy penalty, the return of any, whether bond or free, who had but once passed beyond its borders. It is certain that Vesta wore upon her person, though carefully concealing it from the eyes of white people, a small image of a female in pure Guinea gold, known to have also been worn by the old priestess her grandmother, and supposed to have been received from her when she was on her death-bed. It is also certain that had Vesta wished to do so, she could have commanded from her people whatever she needed, though she seldom called upon them, but supported herself very easily with her own hands.

Up to the time when Bella was sent to boarding-school Vesta had been her nurse and maid. Till then nothing *outré* or weird had developed itself in the woman's manner or character, as ordinarily observed, but the four or five years of solitary life she had lived since then, together with the afflictions that had overwhelmed the family, had a good deal changed her. She did not dress less neatly, nor keep her house untidy; but she talked to herself a good deal, and smiled to herself as crazy people and people with

imaginations will, and she even talked, smiled, and listened as if to other beings than herself, invisible and inaudible to ordinary mortals.

Vesta was seated on a low stool before a fire of pine knots, called "light-wood," she had kindled when the sun withdrew his rays from her western window, and was looking intently into the moving, dancing blaze, as moody people are prone to look. The room, which was large, and ceiled as well as wainscoted with reddish-brown cypress, was furnished with only a cot-bed, a large kitchen table, a movable cupboard, an old bureau, and a few chairs. Old and patched dimity curtains shaded the windows, but they were very clean, as was every thing else in the apartment. The woman, while she looked, began muttering to herself, "There they come again; one shroud, two shrouds, three, four shrouds. How long will they continue to come? When will the fifth one appear, and the last? Is that it? No; there are only the same old number. They say she's dead, but they lie; she's living somewhere this very minute. See there! that one goes right into the smoke—I never saw that before—and now the next one goes, and the next—all four of them have entered into darkness. Good! I shall never see them any more. But what comes next? That's bright; somebody coming, and right soon too. Who can it be? See there! it goes straight toward the smoke. Will it also pass away? No; see, see! it kindles the smoke, and the smoke becomes flame, bright flame, and now all is bright!"

She rose and walked quickly back and forth in the room, then, stopping before the window, looked toward the west. "I see nothing," she said; "yet something is surely coming." She took from her bosom the little image carried there, addressed to it a few words in a strange language uttered with reverent intonation, kissed it, and put it back again, saying, "Oh, if I may hope it is my child!" She resumed her seat, and looked into the fire, but soon rose up again, exclaiming, "It is she!" and, hurrying from the house, ran toward the causeway and bridge that connected with the main-land. But though she went rapidly, there was one



"VESTA WAS SEATED ON A LOW STOOL."

who moved more rapidly still to meet her. It was her child—it was Bella, who appeared running out of the woods on the opposite side, and before Vesta could reach the causeway, had passed it and clasped her in her arms.

"My darling will be safe here with her old nurse; safe and comfortable at least," said Vesta, as she re-entered the house with Bella, and showed her into the apartment that has been described. "I have managed to save things enough for that, though you don't see them in this room."

As Bella, relieved of her mantle, sunk into an arm-chair in front of the blazing light-wood, and looked round upon the apartment which it illuminated and cheered, she exclaimed, in the fullness of her contentment at finding refuge and rest, "I shall be perfectly happy here, *Vesta*; I want nothing better."

And truly the transition from kneeling in the ashes of the once grand mansion of her family, and reposing beneath a roof and beside a hearth which, though rude and humble, were still sufficient for her and her own, was quite equal to the difference between misery and happiness as they are commonly measured to us. And yet while enjoying her repose, and waiting for Vesta and Hector to unload and dismiss the gift-bearing train before preparing supper, she began to feel that after all there was just one thing wanted to make her happiness complete. That one thing, however, was not long in coming, and when it did it was a dish of bacon and eggs, with a corn hoe-cake. Happy Bella! She had eaten nothing since morning save a reminiscence of her youth in shape of a molasses "shingle-cake," purchased of an old "mauma" on the wharf at Georgetown.

warm infusion of a wild tea-plant supplied the drink of the feast, which was lighted with what was a rare luxury in Vesta's household, a candle made by herself from waxy berries gathered in the woods, which yielded, as it burned, a most pleasant incense. Having set all these before her appreciative and thankful "darling," Vesta went to make ready a chamber for her; and when, at the end of the supper, she showed its mistress into it, the latter found an apartment fit for any lady to occupy. There was, to be sure, no carpet save a single strip, but there was a beautifully grained yellow pine floor; and there hung upon the walls two life-sized portraits of her father and mother. "I brought them and the bedclothes and linen from the plantation house," said Vesta, "before they plundered it. The other things have always been left here since I took charge of the place. I tried to save the silver too, but the devils were too quick for me."

Meanwhile Hector, after arranging his stores, set to work to establish his quarters in the kitchen, a detached building; and before long had completed his arrangements, and was enjoying the luxury he had not known for years, of sleeping right in front of a blazing fire. As often as it darkened down, the absence of light awoke him to replenish it from a heap of pine knots prepared for the purpose—that is to say, awoke him just enough to do that and nothing else, and to allow him to know the delicious joy a black man feels when he returns to his sleep.

But Bella and Vesta worshiped their oft-replenished fire with waking eyes, and did not retire till long after midnight. During the hours thus occupied things were told that were never referred to again by either as long as they lived.

In the morning before the sun was up, or even Vesta, Bella was walking on the sea-beach, the chant of whose breakers had filled every interval of the night as if with one unvarying, unending hush to sleep. There was no breeze stirring, but the waves still heaved with a strong swell, and combing high, dashed and sent their waters far up the level beach in vast crystal-clear sheets with hissing and sparkling borders. White as the sea-foam, the gulls sailed and screamed over-

head, as they have always done and will always do, incessantly and discordantly. The low state of the tide permitted her to walk at ease upon a wide space of damp, hard sand lying between the portions that were too wet or too dry, which space, since the last tide covered it, had been traced over with delicate tracks of shore-birds, with hieroglyphic marks made by innumerable little "fiddlers," and the less frequent foot-prints of the quick-fitting, pale-tinted "sea-spirits." Walking there, Bella no longer felt the burden of care and anxiety for the future which oppressed her when she came out. She looked forth upon the infinite ocean and up to the infinite sky, then around upon the insignificant verge of unstable land, narrow and low, where she trod, that lay at the mercy of the winds of the sky and the waves of the sea, like a mere selvedge of time in presence of two eternities, and found that presence so awful and so fearful she was lifted above feeling fear or awe of any earthly circumstance.

"Miss Bella! Miss Bella! are you lost?" cried Vesta close at her side, who had, as she approached, ineffectually exerted her voice to outdo the noise of the gulls and the surf; "but it's always so with me. When I walk on the beach I never know how time goes, and I dare say you have no idea the sun is an hour high and breakfast already on the table."

"Time!" said Bella; "I could live here for eternity. Indeed, I have been feeling as if I were already in eternity—as if I had died and come to another world. Vesta, should I die here, I beg you will bury me on this beach where the tide flows and ebbs. And my spirit will come and walk above where my body is laid, as in the body it has walked here to-day."

"Come, please, to your breakfast, and after that I will make you a nice notch-plait hat to wear when you walk out."

Crab pies and crisp hoe-cake, fried in fat enough to supply the want of butter, and tasting better than the best wheat toast and butter ever did, formed the breakfast. Eating it and relishing it, Bella forgot something of her exaltation, but no whit of the courage she was armed with to meet the problem of life that lay right before her.

She was sitting with folded hands, absorbed in the study of her problem, when Vesta came in with her work-basket and a large ball of palmetto braid of the sort known as "notch-plait," and, taking her place on a stool at Bella's feet, prepared to sew it together in form of a hat. "See how fine it is," she said, handing up the ball, while with a few strands of the material it was made of she began to braid a button or centre to the crown. "I shall make you a nice broad-brimmed hat to shade your face and neck completely."

"Oh, thank you, Vesta," said Bella, taking the braid and carefully examining its foldings. "I used to do notch-plait; but do you think I could learn to make it as fine as this?"

"Easily, ma'am, if you are as quick to learn as when you were a child; but it would soon spoil those beautiful fingers."

"Did you ever make a basket like that?" pointing to one in three stories, formed of rolls of grass bound to one another with strips of palmetto.

"Hundreds of them, ma'am. I can make rush baskets too, great heavy ones, to 'tote' things in."

"We used to have table-mats made of palmetto, cross wove and with a border of notch-plait, did we not?"

"Yes, ma'am; but a better kind is made of grass, just like this basket here; they are thicker, and wear longer. Aunt Calypso, when she was alive, used to make them and send them to Charleston by the steamboat to sell— Oh, mistress, do you know one of Ben's boys, Fortunatus, has got to be head waiter on that boat?"

"Indeed!—Is there much grass and palmetto on the island?"

"There's a heap—at the lower end."

Bella went on to ask so many questions about labor cost and selling prices that the maid opened her eyes, exclaiming,

"Oh my! how many questions my mistress does ask! Did she learn that when she lived among the Yankees? They are a mighty curious people."

"It's business, Vesta, and not curiosity. I am trying to think how I can best go to work for our support."

"Work! support! Why, of course, Hec-

tor and I are going to take care of you. Do you suppose emancipation took away my child from me? or do you think Hector has brought you back from the North to forsake you now? The fact is, mistress, it don't take much to live on the island. I have the double-barreled ducking gun hid away up stairs, and one of the boats is in a safe place, where nobody but I can find it. With them Hector can get game and fish enough for ten families. And what money is wanted to go to the store with, he and I will work for, without your mother's daughter demeaning herself"

"Vesta, feel of my hands."

Vesta felt of their palms and fingers, and looked puzzled.

"Vesta, I can work, and I will. We shall ask Hector to cut and dry for us a good quantity of grass and palmetto, which we will make into mats, hats, or baskets, whichever you think will sell best. Then I will go on the steamboat with them to Charleston, and see how I can dispose of them. If my father's old factors are there, I may apply to them, and perhaps they will put me in a way to sell my goods in New York. I will arrange with Fortunatus to assist me in the business if I need his aid. I am sure there must be people enough somewhere who will buy the nice things we can make. You are already expert, and after your lazy Bella, as you seem to think her, has had time to learn, I think you will confess she is something better than a 'hominy-eater.'"

"But, my dear, sweet young mistress, you are not in earnest?"

"And when I shall have learned how to sell my wares—how many of them I can dispose of, and for what prices, and all that—I may endeavor to increase my gains by setting others to work who will do so at prices that will allow me to make a fair profit."

"A good many would be glad of the chance, that's true," remarked the listener.

"There are several other enterprises I have thought of, such as gathering oysters, of which there are such immense quantities in the backwater and creeks, or buying moss and preparing it for market. Then there's the cedar piggin business, and canning fruit, which I understand perfectly."

"Oh, goodness gracious me!"

"Any thing that will give me a few hundred dollars, with which I may take hold of the plantation, for that's what I'm determined to do. But one thing at a time, and for a good while yet this palmetto and grass work must be our business. Yes, and we'll begin this moment," she cried, rising up with energy. "Let's call Hector, and ask him to go and cut a boat-load for us at once, and spread it to dry. I will go with him."

But Vesta was able to keep the impatient girl within-doors by bringing down from the garret enough of ready-dried material to occupy her hands until more could be gathered and prepared. At Stone House she had limited her hours of work to six at the utmost; but now, despite all entreaty from the troubled Vesta, she extended them to twelve and fourteen, allowing herself no respite—being able to endure none, rather—except

when, in the early morning, she walked on the beach, where the chorus of the waves never failed to charm away all influences that might have disturbed her tranquillity. The example of her industry stimulated that of her companion, who was no sloth either, and the product of their handiwork accumulated day by day, and every day at a more rapid rate. The enthusiasm of a true worker was upon Bella. She lay down and she rose up with only braid and basket work in her mind, and the visions that filled her sleeping hours were of new patterns and improved forms, with glimpses of money and rice-planting in the distance. Women who have sought refuge from spectres of murdered love in the shades of cloister and cell, with strict fasting and incessant prayer, have sometimes been able to make their refuge good. But this one was striving for the same end with only basket-making!





CHAPTER XXII.



AT the close of one of those sales of "blooded stock" which are often held at county seats in the blue-grass region of Kentucky, when, though business was over, a crowd of loungers still hung about the fair grounds and the small race-track where the animals offered were exhibited and tested, Robert Hagan, on his horse Major, rode into the midst of the throng, and, halting there, began to look about him. Major was in magnificent condition, and had been thrice rubbed down that day, and as, lifting his arched neck, he fearlessly glanced his brilliant eye over the two-footed portion of the assembly, he seemed to feel the pride a perfect animal might be presumed to feel over imperfect humanity, could he but know how base it was. Humanity is imperfect and base, to be sure, only because of the almost limitless sphere of its action and its vast possibilities

of development; and when it shall have attained the limits of that sphere and the fullness of its possible development, as the horse has already done within his narrower bounds, maybe the result will compensate for all the botheration it is costing us. But whether or not the horse of fine blood, having perfected his moral nature, can feel scorn for poor undeveloped man, still doomed to struggle onward and upward toward a better estate, but struggling so blindly that even the choicest means given for his sustaining and uplifting—even wine, women, theology, politics, and the society of fine horses—are often perverted to be more of hinderances than helps, it is certainly true that his scorn is merited by such members of our fallen race as commonly make up nine-tenths of those who attend upon him as his parasites, or who buy and sell for gain his noble flesh and blood.

But though Major appeared to excellent advantage, his rider did not, by any means. Robert's clothes were mud-stained and torn, his hat slouched, his hair uncombed, and his face dirty. More than that, his eyes were half closed and his mouth half open. The truth is, he was acting a part—the well-known part of "greenhorn," a thing no better than lying; but he did not know it, as his conscience had not been educated that far.

The two were not long in attracting their full share of attention, notwithstanding a few "scrubs" were going round the course, and soon the proposal was made that the new-comer should show his speed.

"Can he trot?" one inquired.

"I reckon he kin—right smart too," Robert replied.

"What time can he make?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"How fast can he go?"

"I ain't got nary watch; but folks our way tell me he kin go a mile a minute."

Those who heard him laughed loudly, but none the less did as many as could do so gather round to inspect Major's points.

"Put him over the track," cried some of those too far back to see him well.

A sulky and harness were soon provided, and Robert, as awkwardly but as skillfully as he could, drove many times round the course, amidst increasing cheers of those who had no intention to purchase, making the best mile in "two twenty-five," as it is called, which means two minutes and twenty-five seconds. As he pulled up opposite the stand the first question asked was, "Has that nag ever been trained?"

"Trained! what is that?"

Again the laugh rose. "Do you want to sell him?" asked one, in a careless way.

"Yes, I want to sell him bad. I want to buy a farm."

"A farm! What do you expect to get for your horse?"

"Four thousand dollars, I reckon. Folks our way told me to ax that anyhow, to begin with, and then see what offer I could git."

His stupidity became interesting; and though a few denounced the wicked attempt to impose upon their honesty and simplicity, by far the greater number were really duped and immensely entertained. Combinations were made to get the horse for little or nothing, but they all failed. At length the competition between a few became so brisk that twenty-five hundred dollars were offered, and, without any sign of eagerness, real or pretended, were accepted. But the purchaser required, before paying the money, to be satisfied that Robert was the real owner of Major, which made it necessary to defer completing the bargain till the morning. All that night the youth lay beside his faithful friend in the stall, whom he loved too well to part from without feeling pangs that wrung his heart, although he had long habituated himself to the thought of selling that friend, and although the money was to make Bella rich and happy.

Late in the forenoon of the next day the purchaser, having received a satisfactory re-

ply from a person living at the telegraph station nearest Stone House, and well known to the jockey world, to whom he had been referred by Robert, came to ask him "how he would have his money." As the latter had already thoroughly considered that question, he was prompt to answer that he would like it paid to him at the bank, and that the white-haired old gentleman behind the counter there should examine the bills and assure him they were not counterfeit. This having been done, and the bill of sale executed, there occurred a leave-taking between Major and his late owner, which might of itself have satisfied the vendee that the vendor was really the lawful owner of the property sold.

"I don't care about the old saddle or bridle," Robert said, when reminded that they properly belonged to him; "but I'll take the bags, if you please: there's something in them I want to keep."

"Perhaps," remarked the other, "you had better put your money in them; and, by-the-way, I see they are of the same make with a pair I once owned that had a secret pocket. But there comes the train; you must be quick if you wish to take it."

A few minutes later Robert stepped on board the train bound for — Junction, with the saddle-bags swung over his shoulder, and two hundred and fifty ten-dollar bills stuffed in an inside waistcoat pocket he had a year before prudently got made for that very purpose, and armed with only a feeling of distrust toward all mankind. A hundred times during that day's journey he furtively hugged his breast with his elbow, to make sure the money was still in its place, and he studied the faces of every one in the car to judge if any were of thievish propensities. Arrived at the junction he found it would be necessary to pass the night there, and insisting on having a room to himself, was put in a small attic chamber, whose door he found, to his great disgust, was without any means of fortification whatever.

There was no sleep for him that night. Grief for the friend he had just lost, and anxiety for the money he had just gained, exultation over his first and great success in horse-dealing, and, above all, joy at the prospect of soon again seeing Bella, and endow-

ing her with the means of acquiring wealth and rising still further above him, were more than enough to keep him stark awake, and make him long for the hour when the cars for Nashville and the South would come in. But Robert Hagan was not destined to take the Nashville train, nor to travel southward; and thus it befell that he did not:

As the night wore on, the blood, mounting to his head, agitated it with all manner of fancies and apprehensions. Among the rest at length came doubts if his money had been honestly counted, which grew stronger each moment, until they became intolerable, and he must get up and light again his candle and learn the worst. After seeing that his window-shade was drawn down close, he seated himself on the floor, with his back braced against the latchless door, and placing the light between his outspread heels, took out his treasure and began to count. As it was all in ten-dollar bills, he knew that there should be just two hundred and fifty of them. But his fingers were clumsy, and his mind confused, and he could only find at first two hundred and twenty-one bills; the next time he counted there were two hundred and thirty-six, then two hundred and thirty-nine, then two hundred and forty-five; then they went back to two hundred and twenty-one again, then suddenly increased to two hundred and forty-seven; and only after hours of distressing labor and profuse perspiration could he make them amount to the proper sum. When at length he succeeded, he hastily wrapped up the bills, as if fearing, as slang phrase has it, they would again "go back on him," and crowded the package into his almost bursting pocket. "Suppose the stitches should break, and it should fall out," he thought, and with the thought came a recollection of the remark about the secret pocket. He took the bags, and after first opening and looking at the treasure that was not money he had so long secretly carried there, began to examine them inside and out. "It can't be very hard to find if there really is one," he reflected. "I wish, though, I had thought to ask how to look for it. Don't the bottom of this one feel stiffer than that of the other? It does, that's a fact. Why, here it is!" And he pulled out a false bottom,

arranged like an inner sole to a shoe; in doing which he uncovered an envelope that had lain hidden there since the day when he for the first time mounted the mare with foal. The envelope was not sealed nor addressed. Within it was a letter, which was as follows:

"CHICAGO, July 19, 1863.

"MY DEAR WIFE,—I have completely succeeded in the business which has caused us so severe a separation, my only disappointment having come from the delays I have been compelled to submit to. The vessel and cargo sold for something over \$30,000 in gold, which, converted into paper money, has yielded me almost \$48,000. Nearly the whole amount I have placed with my old and tried friend. He is quite rich, and scrupulously honorable, so that I feel the most absolute assurance that, whatever may happen to our other possessions, there is enough secured for our comfortable support. You, whose expectations regarding the result of the war are so different from my own, can not realize how much peace of mind the success of my enterprise affords me.

"On arriving in Chicago I learned that my friend had retired from business, and gone to live on his great farm in Iowa. I have just returned from making him a visit of three days, which I exceedingly enjoyed. He is, you must know, an enthusiast on the subject of cultivating land on a vast scale, and rather advised me to have our funds invested in a desirable tract of land adjoining his own. I left all to his discretion.

"And now, my own dear one, I am on my way to you. I shall leave Chicago to-morrow morning in hope to find my way home by a much shorter route than I looked for, as an opportunity for obtaining a safe-conduct through the Northern lines just now offers, which I am disposed to avail myself of.

"This letter is written with intent to send it by some sure means only in case my plan should fall, and I should be forced to return home by the circuitous and troublesome route I took to get here.

"Should you receive it before you see me, remember that secrecy is very important; for sweeping confiscations are threatened against all property of Southerners found at the North. You will observe that for motives of prudence I mention no names, and subscribe none to this epistle; nor shall I address its envelope until the moment comes for sending it off.

"I beg you will not allow your bereavement and anxiety to prey too much upon you. That the Father of Mercy may assuage your grief, and remove all cause of anxiety, is the prayer of

"Your affectionate husband."

Robert read the mysterious letter twice without having the faintest notion that it related to any circumstance or concerned any person he ever had knowledge of. On a third reading there came a slender clew in shape of a vague recollection that Polly, in

strict confidence, had once told him she believed Bella had been wronged out of some property left by her father; and after further reflecting he was able to recall that Chicago was named in some connection with the circumstance.

He read the letter a fourth time, and then a fifth, and at each reading the clew grew stronger, though slender still. But when he thought to refer again to the date, which he found was only a few days before his own bush-whacking exploit, and at the same moment there flashed in the recollection of what Hector had told him in the ferry-boat concerning the circumstances in which Mr. Johnston met his death, it became clear as light—that Morgan's raid through Ohio in July, 1863, was the opportunity of safe-conduct referred to; that the riderless mare he, Robert, had captured was the one the unfortunate gentleman rode when he was shot; and that the letter that then trembled in the hand of the reader of it was written by Bella's father, and by him concealed in the secret pocket of the saddle-bags.

Bella was rich, then, and independent! The free-will offering Robert was on his way to lay at her feet was not needed, nor would it ever be accepted, or the intent of the unselfish votary ever be known to her. A pang that was selfish came with these thoughts that he was ashamed to feel, followed, and in some slight degree assuaged, by the reflection, nearly as selfish, that to him alone would she owe the discovery of her treasure that had been hidden so long, and to him, and no one else, would she owe the recovery and realization of it; for he resolved to start forthwith for Iowa. But stop! Are you sure you can recover it? No name is given. Iowa is a vast State. There are a good many great farmers in it. Then there is no proof; no receipt for the money was ever given, and as to "honor," two years and a half have elapsed since the war closed, and yet the honorable depositary comes not to look for the heirs or representatives of his dead friend.

"Well," said Robert to himself, after long pondering, "I will go and do what I can, and will not let her know any thing about it until I know certainly if her property is safe or not. If I learn she has been wronged out of it, then I can do as I at first intended."

He replaced the letter in the false pocket, and placed in it his money also, after abstracting, as necessity forced him to do, a few of the two hundred and fifty ten-dollar bills to defray the expense of the journey; and then—as by that time morning had come—got ready to take the first train that should be going in the direction of Chicago.

When, early in the morning of the following day, he arrived in that city, he had already matured his plans of operation. He had also become aware that, what with his tribulations in the cave of the horse-thieves, and journeyings on foot and on horseback since then, the suit of every-day working clothes he had on when he so suddenly left home had become too disgracefully shabby to wear into the presence of his honor the Mayor of Chicago, and resolved to buy a new suit. He had heard all about the iniquitous ways of dealers in ready-made clothes, and in making his purchases tried his best to outwit the one into whose web he happened to fall, as a fly would into that of a spider. But the spider took him into his confidence, informed him that his partner was, he was sorry to say, "a swindling rascal," who was then on his way to New York to sell out the joint stock in trade, and leave him, the unfortunate associate, penniless; for which reason, and in order to realize as much as he could before the consummation of the fraud, the latter would sell at half cost any thing in the shop. Robert believed the rogue, and was taken in indeed. When, having made all his purchases, he arrayed himself in them and looked in the glass, he could not, for the life of him, see why he was not as genteelly dressed as the most genuine gentleman he had met on the streets; but he was not, by any means, though the glass did show a very handsome youth, and decently enough clad.

The injunction to secrecy the letter contained—which he did not know it was no longer necessary to observe—deterred him from frankly unfolding his whole case to the mayor, but he was able to interest that popular officer enough to obtain from him the best advice that could be given: it was that he should go to Iowa City, and there apply to the secretary of the State Board of Agriculture, who would be pretty sure to

know every great farmer in Iowa, and possibly could tell which one of them had formerly resided in Chicago. "You might possibly trace up your man through our commercial agency or detective police," added the mayor, "but that would cost you money, and your best way is to go straight to the capital. Good-morning, Sir."

"Good-morning, Sir," responded the youth. "I am very much obliged to you, and if you ever come our way I hope you will stop and spend a few days with us." Then looking down at his dress, as he went out, he added,

"Nothing like store clothes to do business in."

Arrived at Iowa City, the store clothes again had their effect. "Why, yes," said the secretary. "The gentleman you want must be Mr. Richardson. I know him very well, and know him to be a very fine man." And he gave the inquirer, on a strip of paper, the address, "Samuel Richardson, — Post-office, — County." Robert invited the secretary also to visit him at Stone House, and thanked his stars, his breeches, and his boots.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Has e'er the sun, since time begun,
Such scene of plenty met?
In standing corn he rose at morn,
In standing corn will set."

THE farm of Square Miles, in — County, Iowa, is a snug little tract comprising twenty-three thousand and forty acres of land, which is most of it rolling prairie, the rest being wooded slopes bordering water-courses. The surface, while it is sufficiently uneven to shed its water in briskly flowing, clear streams, and thereby insure as healthy a climate as any new country can have, is level enough to permit the free manœuvring of horse-spaders, drills, cultivators, hoers, ditchers, mowers, reapers, teddies, rakes, and all the cavalry of improved agriculture. Each one of its thirty-six fields is bounded by astronomically ascertained lines, of which two run straight toward the north pole, and two parallel to the equator. Each contains six hundred and forty acres, or one square mile, and is inclosed with a fencing of boards, the posts of which are driven into the ground as piles are driven. The distance between the posts is regulated by an iron hook just one rod long, which trails behind the one-horse sled that carries the simple driving machinery, and by catching the post last driven arrests the further progress of the sled at a point which insures that the post next to be driven shall stand just one rod distant from the other. Thus lines of stakes, easily counted, surround the field, by means of which its area can be readily surveyed and divided, and its cultivation

managed with system and ease. At Square Miles all quantities, numbers, and measurements are large, exact, and easily reckoned. Sheep and hogs are counted by the thousand, and horned cattle by the hundred. Every hay-stack contains one hundred tons, and every corn-crib ten thousand bushels.

The ambition of the proprietor, who was brought up to thoroughly understand agriculture by his father, a very rich Ohio farmer, had been to demonstrate that land in large tracts might be cultivated with system, and with reasonably certain results, and, if managed with the intelligence and energy required for success in other kinds of business, such cultivation might be made as profitable as most of them, while being at the same time the safest of all. With this inspiration, when he retired from the commercial house in which he had accumulated a large fortune, he devoted to an experimental test of his views one of the two townships of land he owned in Iowa, and since then had labored at his problem with the zeal of an enthusiast, the steadiness of a veteran man of business, and the skill of a born and bred farmer.

But no experiment is a certainty, and the proprietor of Square Miles, after ten years' trial of his, during which time he flung into the work all his zeal, steadiness, and skill, found that he had also been obliged to fling

in all his resources of money and property, and contract large debts besides. Embarrassment followed; then came temporary loans at usurious interest, and other make-shifts; then judgments, executions, and mortgages. Still he continued to labor and strive courageously and hopefully, and in the end effectually. The darkest hour of his night was when the civil war came to a close—namely, in the spring of 1865—and the clearest beam of his morning is now brightening his broad, white forehead as he reposes his great frame on a lounge after a fatiguing journey he has just made from the county seat, whither he went two days ago to consummate some important business. His beautiful young wife, who sits beside him and holds his hand, seems as happy as he, for he has just told her of deeds executed and recorded, mortgages canceled, judgments released, and money paid and deposited.

"Let me see, then; how do we stand?" said the wife. "You know I have always refrained from questioning you about your affairs, lest I might be troublesome; but now all is settled, I would like to know what we own."

"In the first place," was his reply, as he doubled up his pillow so as to lift his head high enough to observe well her beaming features, "you know that we don't own the unclosed township; that's sold and gone. In the next place, we do own the whole of Square Miles, with all the stock and implements, besides a good part of last year's crops. Next, we hold a mortgage against the land just sold for a hundred thousand dollars of the purchase-money. Next, we owe no man any thing—"

"Glorious!" exclaimed his wife. "And next?"

"That's all," he said.

"All! And Turtle's-back Farm—don't we own that? You didn't tell me that was in the deed."

"Turtle's-back, my pretty one, is not in the deeds. It has not been sold; it still stands in my name; but, for all that, it is not our property, nor ever was it ours."

"Oh, Mr. Richardson, why did you never tell me so before? Why did you let me set my heart on the beautiful place? Do you *know I am more attached to it than I am to*

Square Miles, and have even thought of persuading you to build the new house there instead of here?" And she almost whimpered.

"Then twenty-three thousand and forty acres in complete order, well stocked, with unsold crops sufficient to pay the next season's expenses, and build a handsome house besides, and a hundred thousand dollars fully secured at eight per cent. interest, out of which she shall receive whatever sum she may be pleased to name as pin-money, are not enough to content a little woman who has said a thousand times she had no desire to be rich, but only wanted to be comfortable; but she must go and covet the possessions of other people, and make herself unhappy because she can't own the whole State! Margery, I'm ashamed of you."

"Please, now, don't be angry with me. I'm not covetous, but I have so long been permitted to look on the place as ours, the news you tell me disturbs me, to say the least. But who does own it, then?"

"The right heirs of my old friend Johnston, who you will remember to have seen here in the summer of 1863. He then placed in my hands forty-seven thousand dollars, to keep or invest for him as I should think best. You knew nothing of the matter, because there was danger the money would be confiscated if it were known to be in my hands."

"I see; you feared to trust your wife."

"With other people's secrets, yes, though I never withheld my own. For the same reason I was compelled, when I invested the money in Turtle's-back and its stock and improvements, to do it all in my own name. Thus, when my embarrassments came, the whole was subjected to my debts, beyond any power I possessed to relieve any part of it. What could I do more than write to my friend, informing him of my condition, and asking his indulgence until I could restore to him his own? This I did as soon as the war closed; but the letter, on the outside of which I wrote the usual request that it should be returned if it could not be delivered, came back, with this indorsement by the postmaster: 'All the family dead.'

"Had I been able to repay the money," continued Mr. Richardson, "I would have gone

to South Carolina and looked up the heirs, whoever they might be; but as it was, I deferred doing so until I could acquit myself of the trust. The time to do this has now come, and early next week I shall be compelled to leave you for that purpose. While I am absent you and the children must make fifty new plans for the new house."

The following day he rode over to Turtle's-back to inspect its condition and take an account of the cattle and other personal property appertaining to it. The farm in question contained four thousand acres, most of which lay within boundaries formed by a considerable river and two of its tributaries, down to the banks of which the land fell off in such even and rounded slopes as to give the resemblance to a turtle's back—whence came the name. It was completely fenced, fully stocked with the best breeds, and provided with all needful buildings, though they were all of them of a rough and temporary sort, except a very pretty white cottage that stood half-way down the southern slope, fronting toward the river, and sheltered from the northwest winds by the elevation at its back. A young grove of planted trees surrounded the cottage, close to which were also a garden of two acres, and a large orchard. Every thing showed conscientious keeping up, as though the trustee, to atone for having innocently imperiled the property confided to him, had done all in his power to increase its value. In consequence of which, as well as of the general and real advance in values from the settlement of the neighborhood, and the fictitious advance in prices from the superabundance of paper money, the property might fairly be called worth a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. And such was the estimate made by Mr. Richardson on a page of foolscap, as he and the overseer of the place sat in conference within the parlor of the cottage. "A pretty property—a very pretty property!" he said to himself. "Would to God my poor friend had been spared to enjoy it, and find here refuge from evil times! What happy neighbors we would have been! I wonder who will now become its occupant!"

The wife of the overseer opened the door,

and there entered Mr. Robert Hagan, who, having called at Square Miles, had been sent over to the cottage to find the person he inquired for. The appearance of Mr. Richardson, and the reception he gave his visitor—both so different from what the latter had any idea of—had the effect of rendering useless and committing to oblivion the long and rather one-sided conversation he had composed during his journey and committed to memory; and in two minutes after the interview began he was frankly unfolding his business and laying bare all its weak points to the man he had prepared and drilled himself to approach as an adversary, with skirmishing and masked artillery. It was only after Robert had told all he knew concerning the fate of the Johnstons, and particularly all relating to Bella, and replied to numerous questions put by Mr. Richardson, that the latter, in his turn, made known what the reader already knows concerning the disposition of the fund confided to him. "Here is a little statement," he said, "that I had prepared for the purpose of making an exhibit to the heirs whom I was about going in search of. In fact, I had made arrangements to go to Carolina for that purpose the beginning of next week. But, after hearing what you have just told me, I can not delay for a moment. I must set out to-morrow to find the poor child. Will you go with me?"

While he said this Robert was trying to look at the memorandum handed him, but what his ears heard made his eyes blind, and the figures danced illegibly before them.

"It foots up something over a hundred and fifty thousand, you will see," said the other, pointing to the bottom of the page.

Robert began to feel that his life had been a failure. "Then, Sir," he said, "you would have gone and looked up Miss Bella, even if I had not come to tell you what I have?"

"Certainly I should have gone to search for the heirs, whoever they might be; but, of course, had I known Bella was living, I would not have waited till this time." After a pause Mr. Richardson added: "I now see I have done very wrong. I should have made more strict inquiry. But I am all the more grateful to the good friends whose

kindness to the poor thing has in so large a measure repaired the ill consequences of my neglect, and to you who have been so good to her in her late trouble."

"But I haven't been good to her. I haven't done her any service, after all," exclaimed Robert, in a distressed tone, "since you say she was sure to have come into her property anyhow, and no thanks to me."

"Please to read the heading of the memorandum you hold," said Mr. Richardson.

Robert read it, as follows:

"Memorandum of property held by Samuel Richardson in trust for the right heirs of James Johnston; the same being the proceeds of a sum of forty-seven thousand dollars deposited by him with said Richardson in the month of July, 1863."

No shadow of doubt remained that all Robert had done for Bella—the selling his horse to set her up in the business of rice-planting, the discovery of the secret pocket and the letter it contained, so mysteriously made, and all his astuteness and energy since then exerted to unravel the clew to its

end and restore her to her rights as sole heir of her father—all had been of no sort of advantage to her, save hastening by a few days Mr. Richardson's departure for South Carolina. But was that nothing?

When, during the evening of that day, Mr. Richardson related the history of Bella Johnston to his wife, and she, by numberless questions put to Robert, had drawn forth details that greatly increased its interest, that lady became quite reconciled to the relinquishment of Turtle's-back Farm to its real owner. "I am sure I shall love her," she said. "Do, my dear, go and bring her directly here. She must live with us, and be my companion and friend. Or should she get married and reside on her own place, then I will have the neighbor and friend I have so long wanted. Won't it be delightful?"

Her husband's face caught the glow of her enthusiasm, but when she glanced toward Robert she saw a face of distress—almost of despair.





CHAPTER XXIV.

"The world is full of fools;
And he who none would view
Must shut himself within a cave,
And break his mirror too."



As the train in which, two days afterward, Mr. Richardson and Robert were traveling on their way southward approached Louisville, Robert's sombre reveries were interrupted by the consciousness that he was being closely scrutinized by a person who sat near him, and whose prominent gray eyes he felt sure he had seen before, though unable to recall when or where it was he and their owner had met. While trying to do so the person in question rose, came to where he sat, and shaking hands as warmly as if they had been old friends, addressed him as "Robert," and inquired if his "good father and mother" were well. Then it became easy to recognize Mr. Gassaway, the proposed purchaser of the valuable property commonly known as Flaming Rock, and the holder of the elder Hagan's covenant to convey.

"Why, really, this is very fortunate," said Mr. Gassaway. "I am now on my way to

Smoky Creek to close up that little affair. We'll travel together. You are going home, I suppose?"

"No," said the other, whose serious expression the speculator closely observed, though he misconstrued its meaning; "I expect to go southward when I leave Louisville."

"But surely you will not be away from home when this business is to be transacted. You know the old gentleman will do nothing without your presence."

Robert, who could not imagine any thing more important was to be done than drafting another whisky and tobacco contract, replied that he could not possibly turn aside from the journey he had undertaken.

"When will you return?"

"In two or three weeks, perhaps," was the careless reply.

"Two or three weeks!" exclaimed Mr. Gassaway, while a suspicion of bad faith on the part of the Hagans, senior and junior, overclouded his mind. "Why, the refusal expires in four days!"

"What refusal?"

"The refusal of the Flaming Rock property, to be sure." Robert stared at the speculator in a way the latter by no means liked. "You can't expect me to let the time go by without making tender of the money," he said, gravely.

"What money?" asked Robert, again at a loss.

"The purchase-money—the sixty thousand dollars," was the reply, in a low whisper. "We are fully prepared to pay it and take the deeds, and, of course, you are ready to make the conveyance. There'll be no difficulty on either point, I'm sure."

This astounding announcement almost flung Robert off his guard. Fortunately it took away his breath until he could reflect on what he should say. "Will you allow me to go and consult with my friend?" at length he said, and rose and went to where Mr. Richardson sat, to whom he related the facts of the case, and asked his advice. That gentleman, after well considering the matter, and casting several searching glances toward the uneasy speculator, who grew each instant more suspicious of treachery against his rights, advised Robert to go with him if he could ascertain that he actually had the money.

"I have known cases like this before," he concluded. "He looks like a fool of the kind that abounds in these days of speculation, and I should not wonder if he were in earnest; but be careful to let as few persons as possible into the business until it is closed, and take nothing but money in payment."

As Robert slowly returned to his seat, the thought of giving up his journey to where he would have seen Bella, and witnessed her happiness on receiving news of her wonderful good fortune, cast a shade of disappointment over his face, notwithstanding he was going to actually secure for his parents a good fortune equally wonderful. And seeing the cloud, Gassaway, who read in it only baffled intrigue, grew more greedy than ever to get rid of his sixty thousand dollars and receive a conveyance of the oil-bearing bluff, while the idea he had entertained of trying to obtain it for a less sum than the price specified in the contract was abandoned as likely to afford pretext to chicanery and fraud to rob him of the fruit of his vigilance.

"You've got the whole sixty thousand with you?" said Robert, resuming his seat.

"If you doubt it, I'll count it before your eyes as soon as we can have a room to ourselves. I mean to do what is fair, and expect other people to do the same," said Mr. Puffing Gassaway, quite emphatically, and looking him right in the eye.

"Oho!" thought the prudent Robert, who for the first time suspected the meaning of the other's suspicions; "perhaps the best thing I can do is to keep silent and let him do all the talking."

Three days later there were collected about the rough table of Hagan's cabin four persons intent on business. On a long bench that was at one side of the table sat the proprietor and his son; on the opposite bench sat Mr. Gassaway; while Squire Slowsure, retired lawyer and acting justice of the peace, who had been brought from Portsmouth to draw up the papers and take the acknowledgments, occupied a stool at the head, holding a position midway between both parties, as his custom was, and siding with neither. On a block stool by the fire-place, and back of Hagan and Robert, Betsey sat apart smoking her pipe, with dilated nostrils, as though she scented something more than tobacco vapors. When Mr. Gassaway had announced to the old couple that he had come to count down the money and take his deed, the news did not, as Robert feared it would, startle either of them into showing signs of satisfaction which might have encouraged the proposed purchaser to attempt making a fresh bargain on better terms for himself. Hagan heard without stirring from his seat, or moving a facial muscle from its stoical repose; while Betsey only scowled, which rather helped on the affair.

First, Gassaway exhibited the package of money he had brought, which Robert, being called on, declared he had found to contain the proper sum, by actual count.

Secondly, the squire wrote a receipt, affixed to it a stamp, duly canceled, presented it to Hagan, who affixed his mark, and then placed it on the table, where it was held firmly beneath his elbow.

Thirdly, a deed was written, which was twice carefully read over and compared, as to the description of the premises, with the original government patent in parchment, and then executed by Mr. Hagan.

"And now, Mistress Hagan," said Squire Slowsure, with deliberate emphasis, "your signature, I believe, comes next in order. Please draw up to the table and set your mark in form of a cross, or in any other form you prefer, right where I now put my finger, after the word 'Betsey,' before the word 'Hagan,' under the word 'her,' and above the word 'mark.'"

"And here's the calico dress," said Mr. Gassaway, nervously smiling.

Betsey smoked her pipe.

The squire and Gassaway repeated what they had said.

Betsey continued to smoke.

Hagan for the first time betrayed a sign of uneasiness by chewing a very little more rapidly his quid.

"Do you hear, Betsey?" he said. "You are to sign now."

"Am I?" said she.

"Mother," whispered Robert in her ear, "why don't you sign it? It will make you rich. The money will buy you a hundred farms better than this one."

His mother flung him from her in that kind of rage a person feels who knows he understands his own business best, and is interfered with by a meddler—flung him from her in a manner that was definitive and conclusive, but without removing her pipe or uttering a word. A pause ensued.

"Do I understand Mistress Hagan to refuse to execute the deed?" inquired the methodical squire. "In case she does," he added, addressing Gassaway, "we may as well return as we came, unless you are satisfied to accept the conveyance without any release of dower."

But the speculator's arrangement with the capitalists who were at his back stipulated for a perfect title, so that release of dower could not by any means be dispensed with, and he rather imprudently declared that the deed would be of no use to him without it.

"But I don't understand Mrs. Hagan as absolutely refusing her signature," he said. "There's a calico dress stipulated for in the instrument, which she wishes to see produced, perhaps;" and unfolding the dress so as to show all its splendor, he went and held it up before her eyes as one would tempt a child with a toy.

Betsey looked at it gravely for a minute or two, as if she would like to remember its pattern and colors another time, then seized and flung it into the fire, where it was quickly burned up. The astonished Gassaway, as soon as he could collect his senses and consider the legal bearings of the act, exclaimed, with an effort to be calm, "I call on Squire Slowsure to take notice of this. I request that he make a minute of it. She accepts

the tender, and I'm entitled to a decree for specific performance of the contract before any court in Christendom."

"You dry up!" screeched the lady, taking the pipe from her mouth and standing up. "A calico dress for me, and sixty thousand dollars for him; that's the odds, is it, between a woman and a man in this yer dod durned world? Them's woman's rights, is they? For a dress pattern you want me to sell myself out o' house and home—to be turned loose with nowhere to tie to—sent adrift with jest one blue and yaller gownd to my back, while he lays round and gets drunk sixty thousand dollars' worth. More'n forty year I've worked for that man. I've brought him ten children, and raised half of 'em on pretty much nothing, what's about as good as most women on the creek kin do; and if Lincoln did take four of 'em and get 'em shot for me, that ain't my fault. More'n forty year I've taken his knock-downs, and kept his dog-oned disagreeable company, and I ain't a-going to sign away all the rights. I've got in God's creation for nothing. I'll see him and you in a tar-kettle first."

She came to a full stop, sat down again, replaced her pipe, and pressing down the ashes in the bowl with her thumb, sucked strongly, with drawn-in cheeks and smacking lips, till she rekindled its fires; then puffed away in resolute silence, which astonished her husband and son, who had never before known her to use so few words to express her ideas, or wind up so soon an oration so well begun. For several moments all remained silent as she. Squire Slowsure spoke first.

"Perhaps, Mr. Hagan," he said, "the lady would be satisfied to sign the deed in consideration of a moderate proportion of the purchase-money being guaranteed to her sole and separate use."

Hagan, though not understanding very well the squire's language, and though he had been thinking out the problem in very different words, had drifted toward the same solution, and turning round to the fuming virago with more kindness of manner than he had shown since the last time they buried one of their boys, said, "Bets, what the devil do you want?"

But Betsey's time for telling what she

wanted had not yet come, and she held her peace, while one after another many different arrangements for her advantage were suggested by the voluble Gassaway or the deliberate Slowsure, all of them, of course, subject to the approval of her husband. Each proposal was better than the last, but she let them go on until she knew by their eager words and Hagan's silence her power was felt and acknowledged, and then she spoke. Taking the pipe from her lips, and pointing its stem toward her husband, she said to the others,

"What are you jawing about? Why can't you hold your tongues like him?"

None of them took her meaning but Hagan. With that delicate perception of his spouse's thoughts, feelings, meanings, and her ways of concealing or revealing them, which comes only of long tribulation in the holy state of matrimony, he knew just what she meant.

"Bets," he said, "if you don't like my way of drawing up writings, suppose you take hold and try yourself."

"I ain't no sech durned fool as you be to conceit I'm a justice of peace," she said; "but if that one there will do the writin', I'll tell him what I want, in short order."

Slowsure took the pen and made ready.

"You put into writin's the sense of this yer," said Betsey. "Nary one of us two old fools ain't fit to be trusted with no big pile of money; but we've got a boy that's got larning, and only one on 'em, and he must take the money and keep it for us to use on so long as we live, and have it all for himself after we'm gone."

"All right," said her husband, apparently or really satisfied. "Why the devil didn't you say so before? You don't suppose I'm fool enough to trouble myself with money business in my old age when I've raised and educated a boy to do it for me?"

So the squire drew up sundry documents, which were then executed, and whose effect was as follows:

First, two thousand dollars was to be deposited in a bank, subject to Hagan's own control, to meet current expenses during the ten months yet to elapse before Robert would be of age. (The squire was too rusty to decide, in the absence of his books, if

by the laws of Ohio a minor could act as trustee.)

Secondly, the remainder was conveyed to Robert in trust to invest it so as to produce an income, except so much as might be needed to purchase a farm for the couple to occupy.

Thirdly, of the net income the husband was to receive one-third, the wife one-third, and the son, for his own use, the remaining third. He was also to have to himself such portion of the shares of his parents as they might in any one year omit to call for, and on the death of either one the entire share of such one was to be his. On the death of both parents the whole was to be held by him absolutely, and the trust discharged.

Then Betsey signed the deed, and the money was counted and delivered simultaneously with the deed. After which Robert returned with Gassaway and the squire to Portsmouth, where banks—those real blessings to the weary and heavy-laden with money—abound, among three of the surest of which he distributed his load, stipulating in each case for six per cent. interest.

Soon after this another farm was bought for the old couple lying a little further up the creek than their other one. It contained fifty acres, and after being newly fenced, abundantly stocked, and provided with a new house and out-buildings of hewn logs, afforded as comfortable a home as creeker's heart could wish. But creekers' hearts are easily contented. The philosophy of their tribe teaches moderation in wants, to the end that leisure may be obtained for enjoying life, and in this philosophy the habits of Bill and Betsey were fixed. As a consequence, Robert was called on for only a small portion yearly of the income from the trust funds, and he thus became to all intents and purposes a rich man. Both parents grew very fond of their boy, though a good while passed before their intercourse with each other was confidential enough to permit them to mutually confess it. But time, prosperity, and the frequent visits of Robert gradually softened, and to some degree improved, both of them; and before the close of their lives they will get to be on tolerably cozy terms.

After having deposited his money, as has been mentioned, Robert went on board the Big Sandy packet, from which he was put on shore at Damarin's landing at half past seven o'clock of a disagreeable evening—so disagreeable that the brightness which beamed from the windows of the parlor of Stone House, and which he knew came more from hickory that blazed on the hearth than from the kerosene lamp that stood on the table, kindled a glow in his breast that warmed him to invoke a blessing on all who were within that house. The whole weight and benefit of the blessing fell upon Polly's head, for it so happened that she was the only inhabitant at the time, and therefore it was that she waited within, cautiously avoiding to unlock the door until Robert's step got near enough for her to know it was his; and then, with a bumping, thumping, but wildly happy bosom, she hastened to let him in, and, as he entered, received him with both hands extended, which caused the arms to extend also; and so it fell out—or fell in—that instead of taking the hands in both of his and shaking them cordially, he pressed both his lips against both of hers, while the arms went round his neck.

"Oh, Polly!" he exclaimed; "ain't I glad to see you, though!"

"Why, Rob—Mr. Hagan!" said she. "You never did this before."

"I know I never did," he said, a little confused, and slightly at a loss for words.

"The more's the pity," thought Polly, who was not confused at all.

Now return we to the sea-shore and to Bella, leaving Robert and Polly to keep house together, as they will have to do for two or three weeks, all alone by themselves, with none to molest or make them afraid.

But is not that dangerous?

Yes, in one sense, though in no evil one, there is certainly danger to one of them. No doubt but the soft-eyed charmer with whom Robert is secluded will take pitiless advantage of his unprotected condition to kindle his love with hers as fire kindles fire. Be sure she will bring against him the whole array of her fascinations, and launch at him all their power. From morning till evening, at the board or by the hearth, she will hold him at disadvantage. She will spread the

meal, fill his cup, and serve his plate, mingling and mixing the while, even as a sorceress would concoct a philter, a sweet yet maidenly coquetry in every cup and dish. As often as they shall meet during the daytime he will come off the worse—or the better—for an encounter with the softening power a lovely and loving being whose every feeling, thought, and action are instinct with emotion toward him must needs exert. And when evening shall come, and in a parlor arranged by her own hands for one special effect, herself dressed and adorned for the same effect, she will contrive that the many hours shall pass so comfortably and pleasantly that comfort and pleasure shall in his mind associate themselves with her. With so many subjects of mutual interest growing out of late events, the conversation need never flag, though it will be very like to break into pauses by no means unpropitious to the end in view. In the stillness of such pauses, all disturbing causes barred out, each wave of influence emanating from her personality will go directly to its destination, and beat upon the shores of his being as vibrations from one star upon the surface of another. When she speaks, her voice, emotional and soft, will invade his ear and play upon his sensorium with a cadence of love, while her eyes emit rays that shall pierce to the inner chambers of his own to illuminate upon its mirrors her own beautiful image. But more potent still than sound of voice or light of eye, all passively to herself, her very presence and proximity will cause to circle about him that strange, nameless, electric sphere that subdues intellect, enchains sense, and bathes both intellect and sense in a soft attraction which it is pain to resist and delight to obey, and which is the ethereal matrix wherein human love has its beginning.

All lying in the way of Robert's being completely subjugated by such influences, and easily within the time limited, is, of course, his love for Bella. But his sentiment for his idol is a kind of adoration that continually lifts her up toward the skies, where dwell the unimpassioned angels, and still tends, by virtue of its very strength, to lift her higher and higher. Even as the Romanians, through the excess of their adora-

tion for the Judean virgin, have at last exalted her quite out of reach of their comprehension and intimate love, so Robert Hagan's Bella-worship labors to exalt his Carolinian maid to realms far beyond reasonable hugging and kissing distance, while at the same time the warm-hearted and lovable

Polly remains conveniently and temptingly near, ready to fill the void that may very well exist in the breast of a man whose love for a woman, however intense and exclusive it may have been, has become etherealized beyond the region of dear, voluptuous tangibility.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN the sea-shore house Bella and Vesta, with the help of Hector, were assorting, counting, and tying up bundles convenient for shipment—their first “venture” of baskets, mats, and hats, destined to test the Charleston market. All being arranged for an early start on the following morning, the old man was dismissed, and the two women sat down to spend the remainder of the evening in conversation.

Bella read over the invoice she had made out, and which gave the quantity, quality, sorts, and sizes of the important shipment, and indulged in as many estimates and anticipations as the milkmaid of the fable, though Vesta gave her credit for keeping within reasonable bounds regarding the return she expected to realize.

“If I can only get fifty dollars for the lot,” said Bella, “I shall feel sure we can realize as much as eight or nine hundred dollars before another year is gone, and then we'll begin rice-planting. Won't that be glorious! There's one thing I mean to do: I'll put a fence round that old field that has lain fallow so long, and on it I'll raise all the corn we'll need, even if we work a dozen hands. I know all about corn-raising.”

And she ran on to detail all the plans she had lately been maturing for gradually extending the area to be cultivated in rice, until, little by little, and at the end of ten years, perhaps, though maybe not in twenty—but sooner or later, at all events—the whole of her ancestral estate would be reclaimed and made productive. She went on to tell how she would select at first only the most capable and well-disposed hands; how she would contrive to feed and clothe them while the crop was being made, and *finally pay them for their labor with shares*

of the net avails, etc., etc., showing that during the short time since her coming to the sea-shore house her swelling brain, that so rounded her beautiful head above the brows, had been as busy as her poor cut, scarred, and browned fingers had been.

But Vesta was only respectfully attentive, and though not neglecting to give the expected assent at the proper times, seemed waiting for the excited talker to get tired or run out of words. At length the latter perceived this, and paused. But Vesta continued to look silently in the fire, and only the unceasing chorus of the sea and the noise of the east wind, its occasional playmate, filled the pause. The surf was loud that evening, for almost a gale was blowing, which whistled about the house and then swept over to the main-land, where it made the tops of the pines answer with a perfect echo and mimicry of the surf, and occasionally with the crash of a riven branch.

After a while Bella asked, “Did you hear what I was saying, Vesta?”

“Yes, I hear,” she replied; “but I don't see it.”

“Don't see what?”

“Rice fields; but I can see great plains of corn, and something else I never saw before, that isn't rice, though. I see trees, but no moss is hanging on their branches. I see a river and creeks, but the water is clear and runs swiftly. The sky is higher and bluer, and the air clearer, than in this country, and the west wind that bends the wide dark green corn blades feels cool on my forehead, and not hot like the summer west wind here. I see a house, but it is not this one, nor the one that's burned; it's a pretty little low white one. And now you appear; you are standing in the porch of the house,

looking toward sunset; you look happy and bright—very happy and bright; and so does he who stands beside you, and holds your hand in his.”

Then quickly waving her hand before her eyes, as if to close the scene, she turned eagerly toward Bella, and demanded, “Promise me that if you go away from here to live any where else, I may go with you. Promise me now. Wherever you may be you will always need Vesta, though not more than she will you. Oh, my mistress, swear it to me!”

Bella shuddered. The words of the woman, wild and visionary as they were, gave her real distress. She had of late so exerted her self-control and self-direction as to have, for the time being, at least, absolutely and without reserve, devoted her whole soul to money-getting—to basket-work in the present and rice-planting in the future. And however the reality of love, a home, and happiness might have been received—and even such a reality would have required for its acceptance a relinquishment of cherished hopes and the enthusiasm of a great enterprise, that would have had its pangs—the misty imaginings of the black woman served only to painfully distract her intensely concentrated mind from the new purpose in which she had found refuge. They brought anguish and not healing to wounds she had covered, not closed.

“Vesta,” she said, imperiously, “I forbid you to ever speak of such things in my presence. If crazy fancies trouble you, making you to imagine you see the future (a thing possible to God alone), never do you dare mention them to me.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed Vesta, in a way that turned Bella’s emotion to terror. “Possible to God alone!—to *your* God, you mean. You don’t know that *my* gods—the gods of my country and my people, have power and goodness to open the eyes of those who serve them, and strengthen their hands to work good and evil to good or evil men, according to their deserts.”

“Oh, Vesta! Vesta! cease all this; the days of miracles are gone, and prophecy is a miracle that is no longer wrought in this world. Those of ancient times, recorded in the Bible, are sufficient for our needs.”

“Miracle and prophecy, the power to bless and to curse, may be impossible to white people and Christians, and their parsons and ministers,” said Vesta, drawing herself up; “but by those of our race who faithfully hold to the worship of their fathers, and call, in their need, upon the gods of Africa, and have been accepted, as I have, into the inner circle of the priesthood, the future can be searched and spells be made to work as easily in these days as in ancient times.”

“But this is paganism and idolatry, which the Bible forbids and God punishes.”

“Your Bible again, and *your* God—how do you know them? How is your religion proved?”

“By miracles—miracles wrought by the founders of it.”

“Ever so long ago,” said Vesta, scornfully; “but mine proves itself. It is proved by miracles I myself am enabled to work—miracles of yesterday, to-day, and every day.”

“If so, they come of the Evil One!”

“And how do you know that yours do not?”

Bella was too much shocked to make any reply, and seeing this, Vesta held her peace, but had to rock in her chair back and forth for a good while before she could calm herself. At length she resumed, in a natural manner:

“Forgive me, honey; I won’t talk any more of such things. Only if what I have tonight predicted concerning yourself comes true you will remember the prediction, won’t you? And will you promise in that case to take me with you wherever you go? Pray do.”

Bella promised.

That night she could get no sleep until after she had said her prayers thrice and sung several hymns. In the morning her two guardians, attended by two others who carried the bundles of merchandise, escorted her over to the river, where she was to take the boat for Charleston. When she went on board, Fortunatus, son of Ben, received as strict a charge from Hector and Vesta that he should “mind” (that is, protect and serve) Miss Bella as if she were an infant or a princess. Among other instructions he was directed to conduct her, as soon as her business should be accomplished, to the

house of Ann Gingercake, with request that she be entertained there until the next day, when the boat would leave on its return trip. "Say to Ann," added Vesta, "that if she has a patient in the house, I beg she will look up lodgings for Miss Bella in that of some one of her friends. Ask her to do all this for the lady's mother's sake and for mine, and I'm sure she will not fail."

Bella's courage and perseverance were sorely tried, after she arrived in Charleston, with going from place to place in search of a purchaser. How much more would they have been tried if, instead of being a beautiful woman, she had been an ugly one, or, worse still, a man! At length she found a business concern, a branch of a New York

house, willing to buy and sell any thing money could be made of, that bought her whole consignment. When she left the store, to the door of which the admiring clerks conducted her, there was a sum of sixty dollars in her pocket, with a large order for more work. Making a discount of ten dollars for the effect of youth and beauty, her expectations were realized, and fortune was within her grasp! Poorly dressed as she was, she walked the street after that with the air of a queen, as, under guidance of the attentive Fortunatus, she took the way toward Archdale Street and the residence of Ann Gingercake, most skillful, kind, attentive, and notable of all the free mulatto nurses in Charleston.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE house of Mrs. Ann Gingercake, which Bella reached late in the afternoon, was a small one, of brick, two stories high, situated far back from the street. It was well whitewashed, as were also the fence of the front yard, the trunks of the pride-of-India trees that shaded the yard, the edges of the doorsteps, and the brick curbings of the one flower bed, and the little walk that led up from the gate—in short, every thing that would take whitewash and hold it. The house was the property of its occupant.

Ann was born free. Her mother, once a slave of the Johnston family, who permitted her to "hire her own time," had availed herself of the *quasi*-freedom so obtained to go to Charleston and set up a stand in the uncovered space that used to be at the corner of Market and Meeting streets, where she long carried on a very profitable business, being widely celebrated for her very superior ginger-cakes, after which she finally got to be named. From the profits of her business transactions—and maybe of her transgressions too—she was enabled in time to purchase her absolute freedom. This happening just before Ann happened, the child was free by birthright. As regards complexion, it took rather after the ginger-cake than after its black-faced mother. Now *whatever might be thought of the prettiness*

of the name of Gingercake, nobody could say that the color of ginger-cake, as worn by Ann of that name, was not a beautiful one. Ann was straight as an arrow, well formed and graceful as a Venus; in manners lady-like and refined; had perfectly Caucasian features, brilliant teeth, large, meaning eyes, black as coals and as capable of fire, and hair that compromised handsomely between straightness and kinkiness by forming itself into luxuriant ringlets. Though barely able to read and write, habitual attendance on people of the best society in her city (and where will better be found?) had imparted to her what dictionary and grammar alone often fail to teach—the ability to speak correctly—and rather grandiloquently too. Although no speck of white glistened in her locks, nor a single wrinkle appeared on her forehead, she was good fifty years old, and the combination she presented of the dignity belonging to that age, and the freshness, suppleness, and vigor belonging to thirty years, was really charming. So thought many a patient of hers, who convalesced under her care more or less enamored of his nurse, and so thought Bella, as, in response to the little bell at the gate which Fortunatus rung, Ann came from the house and tripped down the walk to admit her visitors.

Bella's attendant presented her to Ann, gave the latter Vesta's message, and then withdrew. Ann made no reply to the message until she had conducted the young lady into the neat and well-furnished little parlor, given her a seat, and pressed upon her some cakes and a glass of wine, in doing which she spoke in a subdued voice, and moved about quite noiselessly. "It is a great honor," she then said, "to receive the daughter of dear Mrs. Johnston, who was so kind to me during the year I was in her service at the plantation house. You know, perhaps, I was employed to teach Vesta and Psyche dress-making, which was the occupation I followed then. I do assure you I can never forget your mother's unremitting goodness, Miss Johnston, and am entirely and devotedly at your service. Do you think you could be comfortable in this apartment? I could easily put up a cot for you."

"Then you have a sick person in your house?"

"Yes, miss, most inopportunately—a very ill gentleman, delirious this two weeks with country fever. But I can not endure that you should go elsewhere. Allow me to do for you here the utmost which the painful exigency of my occupation will allow. I do assure you it would afford me unfeigned satisfaction."

"I am certain it would," replied Bella; "but I can not think of remaining to interrupt you in your duties. Your patient must need your closest attention. It is giving you more trouble than I should, if I ask you to direct me to the house of some one of your friends who can receive me. I could not very well go to a hotel, you know."

When Ann found this determination proof against all her polite remonstrances and assurances, she begged of Bella to remain while she went "just a little way round the corner" to look up suitable lodgings. Before going on her errand she pointed up stairs, and said, in a whisper, "He is sleeping now, so I can very well be spared. Should you hear him raving a little in his dreams, it won't alarm you, I hope? I shall return in five minutes."

But she did not succeed so quickly as she had thought, and remained away so long that Bella, after looking casually at the cu-

riosities of the place, had time to fall into a reverie of calculations respecting her business prospects so auspiciously opening; and in the reverie she soon became so completely abstracted as to quite forget there was a crazy man in the house. Naturally enough, then, she was a good deal startled when, in the midst of her pleasant reckonings, she heard coming from the chamber above the murmuring of a human voice, low and indistinct though it was. It continued but a short time, however, and before it was renewed she had so far recovered from the shock as to feel no alarm, and presently got so used to it that she occupied herself with intently listening, in hopes to catch the meaning of some of the thickly uttered and incoherent words. This occupation but poorly prepared her, though, for a much louder and more violent outbreak, which seemed to indicate that the sufferer had woken; and when it came, her impulse was to run from the house. But her courage having controlled the impulse, and the ravings somewhat subsiding, she again found herself getting used to the situation, and actually endeavoring to derive from the sounds she heard some sort of idea of the person from whom they came, though at the same time nervously wishing Ann would return to her patient before dusk should deepen into darkness.

"Bella! Bella! Bella!"

Girl! you are called! Do you hear? Do you know the voice now, that till now not even the ear of love was able to recognize as ever known before?

"Bella! Bella!" is repeated, faintly and complainingly, but quite distinctly and naturally, as if the name itself were a spell to charm away for the moment the delirium of him who invoked it. Yes! she knows the voice now. She knows she is called, but does not reply; knows she is wanted, but does not go—can not. A palsy is on every member and a cold weight on her breast that is expelling her very life. At length she finds barely strength enough to rise. Slowly and heavily she moves forward, putting her hands on pieces of furniture in her way as if she must pull herself along at every step; but it is not in the direction of the stairs: it is toward the outer door. ~~From~~

ing through it, she is able to move more freely, and before long has reached the street gate. She is trying to escape from him and from herself, but at too slow a pace to avoid hearing sounds of a fresh access of raving issue from the chamber, and as she goes through into the street and hurries away, it is not the low, complaining call that follows her, but a hard, derisive laugh.

A few minutes afterward the nurse returned, to find nobody in the house but her patient, who was awake, and more out of his head than ever. It was not until some one or two hours later, and long after dark, that the continually increasing anxiety she was feeling concerning the disappearance of Bella was relieved by the return of that young lady. As she entered she said, with something like the embarrassment of a truant, "You must think I acted very strangely—"

But Ann spared her further explanation by remarking, "I'm sorry my patient frightened you away. I should not have left you so long alone, but I had to go farther than I expected. However, I have made excellent arrangements, which I hope will please you. After you have taken your tea I will send my neighbor's boy to show you the place."

"How kind you are!" said Bella, who then paused in an embarrassed manner; after which she added, "Your patient is very ill—dangerously so?"

"I consider him very ill, certainly, miss; but our present system of treating country fevers is so efficacious, we feel sure of good results in the great majority of cases. Our practice is very mild now, careful nursing being the chief reliance; but that is indispensable in a grave case, for which reason the doctor had the present one early placed under my charge."

"How long has he been ill?"

"Nearly three weeks, and all the time out of his head. He caught the fever by visiting the Waccamaw country, and sleeping several nights there without once thinking to ask if there had been a frost; but the Northern people seem ignorant of the first principles of hygiene."

"Do you not sometimes need assistance in nursing those who are very ill—as in the *present case, for instance?*"

"Under the old bleeding, blistering, vomiting, and drastic system two nurses were often required; but they seldom are now."

"Do you know from what part of the North he comes? I have lived in the North several years, you know."

"This gentleman—General Damarin? He comes from Ohio."

"Indeed! why, then I know his family well. His sister and I were school-mates for many years, and I am indebted to his mother for kindness I can never repay."

This was said with well-acted surprise, yet with a calmness, the result of preparation, that prevented all suspicion of her true relations to the sick man.

"Indeed! You know him! Then you can inform me how a letter should be addressed in order to reach his parents. The doctor has not written because the only record on the hotel books was 'General Damarin, of Ohio.'"

"I myself will write to them at once, and they will certainly start to come to him as soon as they get the letter. But a full week must elapse before they reach here, and in the mean time—they were such good friends to me—do you not think I ought to remain and help you nurse him—until they arrive, I mean, or until he is out of danger? Is it not my duty, I mean?"

"Why, certainly, Miss Johnston, if you think you have the requisite fortitude, and if it will gratify you—I would be very glad of your assistance, I should say."

And so it was arranged, just as Bella had planned during the last and calmer part of the walk she had begun in so much agitation. Room was made for her in the little house. And the next day, after she had written and mailed a letter to Mrs. Damarin, and sent a message to Vesta by Fortunatus, she prepared herself to enter the apartment where lay her fever-stricken lover.

"It will require some fortitude at first," was the caution the nurse gave before leading the way up stairs. She little knew how much fortitude there was need of, nor how much was being exerted. Bella followed into the chamber—met the sight that was there—stood still for some minutes—advanced to the bedside—seated herself, and took in her own the skeleton hand that lay

on the coverlet—all with a manner which, if not entirely calm, was perfectly natural to the character she had assumed of a mere friend to the sufferer. And as long as the nurse was present she continued to hold the listless hand, to look upon the half-closed, glassy eye, the black and shrunken lips, the white, uncovered teeth, the thin, pinched nose, the caving temples and consuming cheeks, and the large white forehead above them, it alone of all the features undeformed by disease—enduring her anguish and acting her part. It was only after Ann, profiting by the attendance of her volunteer assistant, left the house, to be absent for one or two hours, that the seals were broken that had closed the sweet and bitter fountains of the heart.

When the doctor came, which was about noon, Bella made as many inquiries of him as she dared, but got nothing definite in reply, and therefore nothing encouraging. There were, as yet, he said, no signs of the fever's being about to break. If it should, the head symptoms would disappear, and after that the result must depend on how much strength remained—good nursing always presupposed. On his next visit Bella was afraid to repeat her questioning, but Ann asked him if he did not think there was just a little improvement. "I really think, doctor," she said, approaching her open palm to the red cheek as if it were a hot flat-iron she was testing, and then passing it over the forehead—"I really think there is not so much fever as there was, and the surface feels softer, if not cooler. He certainly is not so much 'out' as he was."

"It may be, Ann: your opportunities of knowing his condition are better than mine, and your judgment full as good; but" (touching the pulse), "so far as I can see, there is no change of any kind."

But the third day he was quite ready to admit a perceptible change for the better. And then Bella ventured to ask how it would be known if the patient should get to be out of danger. "His fever may break at any time," was the answer; "and after that we shall soon be able to know; it may break within twenty-four hours; I shouldn't wonder if it did, for certainly that last medicine has worked like a charm."

Of course it has, doctor! It is a charming prescription, that last, and not bad to take. Do you believe that Nature, in the battle she is waging against disease, has had no help from the almost continual presence in that room of a loving woman, strong of heart, perfect in health, and superabounding in nervous power? Can you imagine the clasp of his fingers in hers, which, if the man were in health, would send currents to his very heart, can impart nothing magnetic now? or that the palm she gently presses on his forehead gives no reinforcement to the battery that is working beneath it? or that the thousand meetings of his wandering eyes with her calm and gentle ones have had no soothing effect? or that her prayers and concentrated will have done the case no good? Of course the medicine works like a charm. You may call it "Bella-Donna" if a name is wanted.

The morning following, when Ann, having, as usual, first prepared breakfast, went up stairs to relieve her assistant, who had remained on duty since midnight, she found her watching more intently than usual the appearance of the patient, who was asleep. The watcher silently unclasped her hands that were resting on her lap, and pointed toward him, fixing her eyes keenly at the same time on the expression of the nurse, who went noiselessly and bent over the sleeper, then turned and nodded with a meaning smile. "Since when?" she whispered.

"Since soon after you left him."

"He is in a beautiful perspiration. We must keep him so, and when he wakes there will be a favorable change. I'm confident of it. Now, please, go to your breakfast, and do not hurry through it on my account."

Bella clasped her hands again, and resting them on her knee, bent forward till she brought her face close to that which lay turned toward her, and looked at it long. Then rising, she gathered from the table her hat, handkerchief, veil, and little basket, and withdrew from the room, whispering as she went, "Don't wait for me to call you; pray come to your breakfast as soon as you will."

Ann opened her large eyes, but said nothing. On going down half an hour later, she

found Bella engaged in addressing a letter she had just written. She handed it to Ann, saying, "I shall remain with you, if I may be allowed, until assured he is quite out of danger. After that I must return home without further delay. Should I go before his friends arrive, be so good as to give them this letter. It explains all I wish them or him to know."

"But why not wait and see them? Good gracious! Please, Miss Bella, do not go before your friends come," said Ann, whose eyes again opened wide. "Won't they think it very strange if you do?"

"They will understand my reasons perfectly. I wish it were proper I should make them known to you, for I have a request to make which you must think needs explanation.* I want you to keep a secret, Ann. Will you do so?"

Had not Ann been completely blinded by Bella's acting she would have needed nothing more to completely enlighten her as to the true state of affairs; as it was, she remained in the unrest of uncertainty so dreadful to a single woman of her age. "You may safely confide in me," she answered. "We nurses are as accustomed to receive confidences as lawyers or Catholic priests are, and I, for one, have the name of keeping them as discreetly."

"Oh, thank you, Ann: I said my letter contained all it was important General Damarin or his family should know. It tells them I have been here, but not that I have remained here or helped you nurse him. Please let them know nothing further than that, and I shall never cease to be grateful."

Ann promised afresh.

That afternoon William Damarin woke up relieved of fever and restored to reason. And he gained strength so rapidly that two days later the physician pronounced him out of danger, provided always that he remained in Ann's charge and obedient to her orders. On learning this from the doctor's own lips, Bella, who had not once returned to the sick-chamber, prepared to depart. In two hours the boat would leave the wharf. With thanks whose sweetness made them worth more than gold she repaid Ann's hospitality, then hastened from the house, and was soon on board.

As she went past the clerk's office, before which some passengers were waiting to pay their fare, Fortunatus accosted her by name, made his compliments, and offered his services. Passing on, she found her way to the upper deck and to its extreme bow end, that projected far out of the dock, and there, where none could observe her features, leaned languidly over the rail, and looked down into the water—not off upon the ocean or upward to the sky, as she would have done a week before, but downward, as we do when we lose hope in earth or heaven. Some cat-fish were near the surface, whose movements her eyes listlessly followed. One of them looked upward at her with his own insolent, round, protruding eyes in a way that made her flesh creep; for the sight of the deep clear water below, with only a slender railing between her and it, had caused certain thoughts to pass through her mind, and the look of the fish caused another, which said, "Would you like those disgusting mouths to rend your flesh?"

"But if I were dead," she answered to herself, "I could know nothing of it."

"Unless," spoke another thought, "there should linger just enough consciousness for you to know, maybe feel, they were eating you."

"But I should find rest—delightful, eternal rest."

"Very delightful, if you could only live to enjoy your annihilation."

"Or pass into a better life—"

"Which would still be to live, to feel, and to remember."

"No, no, no! I'm tired of life; I hate existence, present and future; I want annihilation. Surely there are depths in the ocean over which this vessel will go to-night where I may plunge in and find it."

Bella, if you put it off till night, it will be forever deferred. But never mind that: suicide is a resource we can always fall back upon. See! here comes one who will move an indefinite postponement of the whole subject. It was Mr. Richardson, who, having heard Fortunatus address "Miss Bella," and mention "Multiflora," had followed, and learned from him that the poorly dressed girl he had seen come upon the boat was really the heiress he was on his way to find.

He introduced himself as her father's friend; said he had come from Iowa expressly to see her on important business, and had taken passage to Multiflora, expecting to find her there. "But," he added, "I am sorry to learn that the house no longer exists."

"No, Sir," said Bella. "My only home now is at the sea-shore house, and that," she added, with much embarrassment, "is quite an unfit place to receive you. Indeed, I do not see how I can invite you there."

"Then we must go on shore at once, and return to the hotel." And seeing her hesitate, he added, "My business is sufficiently important, I assure you."

She still hesitated, then said, "Would it require much time? The boat will not leave for an hour yet."

"It will take much longer than that. In the first place, I have a long story to tell you, which I beg you will listen to with charity and kindness, and then, if you can, forgive me. Next, this considerable bundle of papers is to be looked over. They contain a detailed statement of the disposition made of a sum of money which my friend placed in my hands a short time before his death, to be invested in Iowa property. The accounts and an inventory attached show that you are now the sole owner of an estate worth something over one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. You will now see, I trust, that our best plan is to go on shore before the boat leaves. Let me reclaim your baggage and escort you to your lodgings."

Bella started, stared at him blankly at first, then with amazement, then with scrutiny. "I will go with you, Sir," at length she said, taking the arm he offered; "but I have no baggage, only this" (holding up her little basket). "I have been too poor to own any." After going a few steps she stopped and looked in his face, while she said, "Oh, Sir, I have been very poor. It was time you should come."

Her words sorely wounded him; but when, during the evening of that day, in Ann's pleasant parlor, he related his story, she generously argued with him that he had done her no wrong, and in the comments she made, as he explained the inventory and accounts and described the property, took

care to make him feel how much she appreciated all he had accomplished for her interest. And, seated in that parlor, bending over the table where the papers were displayed, examining them in detail, and receiving explanations in answer to her inquiries, all in a low tone, lest the patient should be disturbed, Bella seemed no longer the same woman whose reveries of suicide Mr. Richardson had interrupted. Life had returned to her, and she was all alive to the business in hand. Each item of the inventory interested her, from the Alderneys and Durhams to the bantams and Dorkings, but her most particular inquiries were concerning the cottage at Turtle's-back. "What a funny name!" she exclaimed, with a whispered laugh.

"It is easily changed," Mr. Richardson remarked.

"No, no; I will change nothing you have done, nor shall a single flower or shrub planted by good Mrs. Richardson ever be stirred. She's handsome, you say?"

"I think when you see her you will call her beautiful—when you know her I'm sure you will. She is much nearer your age than mine."

"How I shall love her—and make her love me too! And the sheep," said Bella, running her finger down the page; "how many? Supposed to number about twenty-two hundred. What washings and what shearings we'll have! And six Alderneys! Ah, you shall judge whether Mrs. Richardson can make sweeter butter than I."

"You know how to churn, then?"

"Yes, indeed; I know every thing should be known by a farmer's"—wife she did not quite say, for she stopped in time.

As soon as Mr. Richardson was gone, Ann, whose curiosity was a consuming fire, came in to have it quenched. To withhold all from her would have been a cruelty Bella was incapable of toward one who had never withheld from her the respect due to an heiress of three Iowa estates; so she made known to the good woman the substance of the news, and followed it up with a request, diffidently made, that she might be permitted to remain under the hospitable little roof in Archdale Street until the time came for leaving Charleston.

"You know I shall be most happy, most gratified, if you will do so, Miss Bella," replied Ann, her eyes suffused with tears of sympathy and pleasure.

"I will trouble you as little as possible, and would also wish to help you all in my power. Therefore, if you will allow me, I will again take turns with you at nursing. Let me begin to-morrow morning, won't you?" Bella worded all this very well, but her manner was confused and bungling to a shocking degree. Ann's eyes opened, and they remained open. She perfectly recognized the symptoms of the case.

"Shall I prepare—shall I tell him you will take charge of him with me?"

"If you think it necessary; otherwise I would prefer not."

Ann thought he was gaining so fast he could bear a little pleasant surprise, and said so, at the same time resolving to witness the surprise, even if she had to bore an auger hole through the partition.

Late on the following day Mr. and Mrs. Damarin arrived. Worn with traveling night and day, and depressed with anxiety that was hardly less than dependency, they presented themselves at the gate in a condition little suited for meeting the shock of the two joys which awaited them within—the recovery of their son and the restoration to them of their Bella. It was she who ran swiftly to meet them in the yard, "Thy son liveth!" her only words of greeting. The embrace she then gave them was far from being that of a returned fugitive. She caressed and clung to them both as if they be-

longed to her and she to them. And when, with hardly another word, she conducted them to the presence of the up-bolstered convalescent, and there remained, to act as moderator to the agitation of the three, and offered to the mother the chair at the bedside she had herself been occupying, it was with the manner of one who was quite at home there, as of her own good right. And after the conversation became comparatively quiet, and she and William, taking part in it, would address each other, the manner of both plainly enough told that he and she perfectly understood one another, that there was no cloud between them, and that to them the whole universe contained nothing but light.

The little kiss with which Robert and Polly met, when on that unpleasant evening he re-entered the pleasant portal of Stone House, was only the natural outbudding of the circumstances in which they were. Very much in the way that was predicted, those circumstances continued to act, continued to bear their natural fruit and to ripen it, down to the time when the party from Charleston got home. Bella, soon divining that the fruit was ripe, though not yet plucked, shook the tree a little. In fact, so anxious was she there should be no failure in the affair, she gave her personal presence at the interview wherein it was arranged, and herself saw to it that there was no mistake made. Finally, to bind the bargain and seal them each unto the other, she stamped them each with the signet of her own sweet lips.



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